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B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look



By Joe Pappalardo
Photographs courtesy of United States Air Force
Published on: July 14, 2008

After taking you inside the Air Force's investigation into the crash of a B-2 stealth bomber, PopularMechanics.com has obtained the first still photos of the February accident—and they're pretty stunning. With last month's technical report detailing the demise of the *Spirit of Kansas* came footage from security cameras at Andersen Air Force base in Guam.

Officials also snapped—but, until now, did not release—still photos of that crash site. In the pictures, firefighters work in silvery suits and crash teams cautiously approach the empty ejection seats, which use explosive charges to gain distance from a foundering airplane. Both pilots were able to eject safely through panels in the airplane's cockpit roof. The white spray seen in the photos is fire suppression foam.

Scroll down for more—including an illustrated timeline of the crash—and stay tuned to PM's *Aviation Central* for more details as they unfold...



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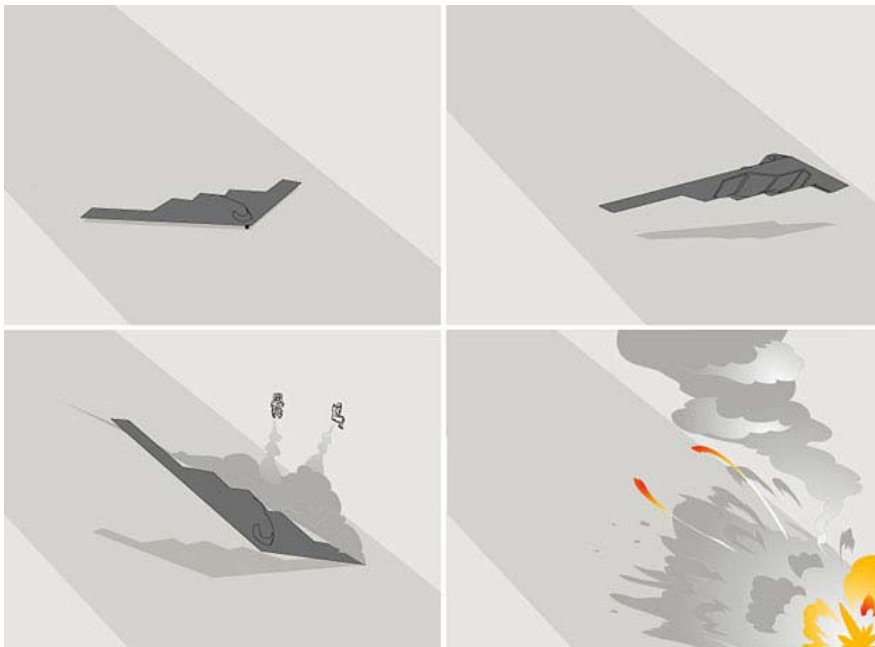
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(Illustrations by Remie Geoffroi)

9:29 am /// Waterlogged /// During a preflight check, the pilot notices three air data sensors are malfunctioning. Unknown to the crew, water in the sensors is skewing the air-pressure readings too high.

9:34 am /// Recalibration /// A ground crewman, using a cockpit keyboard, recalibrates the three waterlogged sensors. The preflight checks continue, and the B-2 taxis to runway Zero-Six-Right (above, top left).

10:29 am /// Boiling Sensors /// Before takeoff, the pilot turns on the sensors' heaters. Water in the sensors evaporates; the readings are now normal, but the earlier fix skews air-pressure data too low.

10:30:12 am /// Slow Start /// The B-2 starts takeoff. The on-board flight computer displays the wrong airspeed, causing the pilot to lift off at 133 knots (153 mph) rather than the required 145 knots.

10:30:50 am /// Auto Override /// The flight computer, relying on bad air-pressure readings, concludes the aircraft is in a nose-low altitude and automatically raises the nose to 30 degrees (top right).

10:31:06 am /// Fiery Ending /// The B-2, going too slowly, with its nose angled too high, stalls. As the airplane's wing scrapes the runway (bottom left), the pilot and commander safely eject. The B-2 crashes (bottom right).

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Reader Comments

61. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

There is an eject feature on the aircraft because the pilots are cost more than the plane. In addition to all the life insurance these guys have that the AF would have to pay out, the amount of money that all the training costs to retrain to new pilots is a lot higher. Plus, B2 pilots are the best and most experienced in the AF.

60. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Link to the GAO estimate for B-2 bombers puts them each at just over 2 million dollars apiece, based on previous construction costs. That billion dollar figure is pure R&D, knuckleheads. <http://www.fas.org/man/gao/gao95164.htm>

59. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

I am truly saddened at the loss of one of our priceless critical assets, but I am even more alarmed at our lack of national character displayed in the other comments such as "they go down with the plane." No aircraft, not even the B-2 is worth one pilot's life. It is a sad time we live in when Popular Mechanics readers are wishing death on America's military.

58. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

The "sensors" that they are talking about are Pitot tubes that take direct air input from processing airspeed. The "heaters" are anti-ice/de-ice so that during flight the Pitot tube does not freeze over rendering an forward airspeed indication of 0 knots. Guam is very humid even more so than Florida, condensation in pitot tubes does not evaporate like you would think it does. In that same black car in Florida spill a cup of water in the interior and shut the doors, does it dry up, not a chance. The B-2 is a composite aircraft, That composite material is extremely toxic especially when it's on fire, so the need for HAZMAT suits and S.C.B.A's. hope that help some of you out. Others, maybe you just need medication.

57. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

pretty hilarious to read all the snarky comments below. Here's the shocker folks: the aircraft designed to look like a mosquito on enemy radar, and is one of the most effective tools in our arsenal. as such it is A) expensive and B) painfully complicated to both fly and maintain. -John

56. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

The b2 has an eject feature?! That's ridiculous! The plane costs over \$1billion dollars! The pilots should be doing everything they can to save it. Otherwise they go down with the plane. Its as simple as that. That is our taxpayer money gone to waste!

55. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

The suits are cool. I hope they weren't carrying nucs?

54. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Maybe I could drag Dick Cheney out of his bunker and show him what a real crash looks like vs. the illusion of flight

77

53. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

It's amazing how simple explanations don't convince some people. They want to believe that it is all a conspiracy.

52. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Bigger picture: Like the F-117, Space Shuttle, Raptor, etc., the B-2 is nothing but a make-work project while the

UFO-inspired black triangles get operational. Don't believe? Check the 'net for "black triangles." If you don't want to believe they are ours, they must be alien. Take your choice.

51. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

The U.S. Gov. has insurance on all its assets. Ships, Planes, Tanks and Troops. I've read that a fallen US Service member is a 1 Million dollar pay out to the government. pay \$100,000 to the family, Keep \$900,000. pretty good investment wouldn't you say They are just trying to raise a little capital. 1.4 billion should cover Black Water's Bill for some time.

50. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Man that was bad! That is \$1,400,000,000 gone down the drain. I hope the pilots are OK.

49. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Pure BS. Guam had a long dry spell and the previous night was windy. There was no moisture. If you're in Florida take your hand and put it on a black car at about noon....warm ain't it? Guam's a little further south and sees a bit more sun. Rumor is there are witnesses seeing green flashes and explosions possibly from parts of a satellite on re-entry near the Guam International Airport....successfully shot down.

48. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Stupid Stupid Stupid - Designing a fly by wire computer controlled plane, where pilots have no control once the computer crashes, makes some people in the tech industry really rich, while endangering pilots' lives. Mil-Ind_Complex is outta control and in the hands of tunnel vision'd technocrat, money making servile yes men, who endanger this country's liberties via greed and corruption and misuse of science.

47. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Why are all the rescue personnel wearing HAZMAT suits? Did this aircraft have nuclear weapons aboard?

46. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

At 9:29 the sensors are indicating wrong. At 9:34 the ground crewman changes the sensors' readout. At 10:29 the pilot turns on the sensor heaters??? Are the heaters there to dry the sensors so they work properly? Why didn't the ground crewman turn them on first then read the sensors? Sounds like a wrong protocol or ignorant crewman.

45. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Yes, it was a stupid mistake. Yes, it cost a billion plus US dollars. But it made such beautiful smoke. The crew will probably get a medal. And think of how much kerosene we'll save.

44. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Website: www.nigelwhitaker.com

I bet the groundcrew will take much of the blame for this, improper diagnostics, etc, but looking at the timeline, with only an hour to take off time, there will have been pressure on the groundcrew to get the aircraft serviceable - it happens in all air forces. So many aircraft incidents and crashes have as a cause or contributory factor, some element of human failing caused by time pressure, whether real or self-induced.

43. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Oh my God a B2 Bomber is crushed down, wow it's been a very expensive plane & a hightech. what happens is an accident. We all know that this plane is a supermachine. It's not a pilot's fault, it's the wind the nature...

42. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

These photos are not photo shopped. I was at the crash site and they are real. Accidents happen, that is why they are called accidents. Quit crying about the aircraft and be happy that the pilots survived.

41. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

It's amazing that when things do go wrong in situations like these they really do go wrong in the most unimaginable ways. Well, these things do happen and learning from it is always better. That's what aviation is all about.

40. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Electrogravitics system on the aircraft. Look it up, there's your failure...

39. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

"Can we make the people that screwed up pay for the damage? Or at least retire them or transfer them to a remote post in Alaska?" How about just make them the GOP nominees for president and vice-president? After all, being a f*ckup as a pilot seems to be a prerequisite for the republicans. After all, didn't John McCain crash three planes during his Navy career and become implicated in a fire onboard the carrier Forrestal that resulted in the deaths of over 100 sailors? By the way, just like McCain and the Forrestal fire, I think that the crew of the B-2 will be exonerated. The B-2 moisture problem was previously documented and the crew did things exactly according to their training.

38. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Now I may be real stupid, but I thought B2s cost 2.2 billion apiece. When this crash happened was the first time I heard of "discounted" B2.

37. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

At a cost of \$1,400,000,000 each, this single crash represents approximately \$4.65 in taxes for every man, woman, and child in the United States.

36. to comment number 27

You are incorrect on this. The reason for the climate controlled hangars is for the radar absorbing coatings not being able to survive in humid conditions for long times. It has nothing to do with this crash. What caused this crash has happened in almost every type of plane.

35. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Website: www.ms.com

The pilots are WIMPS they could have stayed with the plan it did not crash that bad

34. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

I'm just glad the pilot and co-pilot are ok. Also, notice the hazmat gear that the firefighters have to wear because of the toxins that the burning plane gave off. That stealth stuff is nasty.

33. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Did you read the part where they turned the heaters for the sensors on which evaporated the water and allowed the sensors to work properly? If they had turned the heaters on when the malfunction occurred then they never would have had to recalibrate the sensors and we would still have the aircraft!

32. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

All that fire and the plane comes out in one piece, albeit burnt? That timeline really helps. I assume each frame in the timeline is one hour apart. Joking aside, it's hard to be certain if the second frame in the timeline is the lower left or upper right.

31. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Website: www.piecofcakememphis.com

If the sensors had heaters made esp. for evaporating any water that may get in them, why wasn't the ground crewman instructed to turn on those heaters instead of recalibrating the sensors? On a positive note, I'm glad no one was hurt.

30. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Chris, I'm surprised you didn't blame the crash on President Bush!

29. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Looks like a flaw in the flight control systems, not by it getting wet. In case you didn't know (#27)there is moisture in the air at high altitudes along with getting up there. All composites (in airplanes at least) can withstand some type of moisture, they just prefer not to.

28. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

These things happen. After a few years working structural maintenance on older aircraft for the Air Force I have seen some of the smallest things wreak havoc on an aircraft and its' overall safety. All aircraft maintenance troops, crew chiefs, etc, know the dangers of small trash aka FOD and are drilled and drilled and inspected by QA to ensure they always pay attention to detail and leave no shavings of metal or small fasteners behind. It still happens. But the real question, is why did the "ground crewman"/crew chief not take a closer look at the sensors? Its sounds like his first reaction was to tare/zero the sensors. Thats like calibrating your scale with an anvil on it, then wondering why you don't weigh anything. Except this scale guides the aircraft safely. Water is a common issue, also is ice, dirt clogs, etc. I'm sure a deep investigation has already been conducted, and someone is probably already a civilian over this one. This says something about fly by wire setups. PAY ATTENTION TO DETAIL!

27. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

I remember reading somewhere several years ago that the B2 had a near-fatal flaw that the Air Force was covering up: the planes wouldn't function correctly if they were allowed to get wet. They had to be kept in hangars at all times, and couldn't be flown in bad weather. It appears that the story was true, and somebody screwed up by allowing this one to get wet. That's right, they spend a billion dollars apiece on planes that won't work if they get wet. And they keep it a secret from us.

26. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

I worked aircraft maintenance in the AF on C-5s...definitely sounds like someone performed a quick fix (without using a T.O., or a manual in other words) to get the flight off the ground on-time, then supervision signed-off the work without an inspection. definitely not the pilot's fault, as they don't read the pages and pages and pages of maintenance logs. that's why a qualified supervisor is supposed to inspect & signoff the work. way to go, airman dipsh*t.

25. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Website: [bharath.name](#)

I have heard that a B-2 stealth bomber costs nearly a billion USD. Such a small error had caused a billion dollar loss. People should try to be more careful.

24. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Website: [www.shafferbros.com](#)

I think that last square of 4 cartoon images really explains it well. I originally thought the plane exploded first, then tried to take off, then the crew decided they should bail. But luckily, it's all clear now.

23. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

I wonder why three sensors, all failing at the same time, didnt attract leadership's attention? Don't they have a Quality Assurance program that would require some kind of waiver to continue with the flight? This is a travesty. All that money. Tom <http://www.dare2believe.com>

22. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

At \$1.4B each, it goes without saying that you can't afford to lose too many of these beauties, whoa! Interesting that human decisions to expedite things by recalibrating the water logged sensors ultimately led to this crash. Whatever the case, either procedures surrounding erroneous sensor reading must be improved, across the board, and then properly followed. Just think, in the age of computer controlled aircraft, sensor technicians have some of weightiest responsibilities.

21. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

I worked the B2 Program in the mid 90s at Whiteman AFB. We were warned that the composite fiber shell of the plane would be highly lethal if the plane crashed or burned. Supposedly the particles are so microscopic they would destroy your lungs. At that time, only the base fire department had the required equipment to go anywhere near them during an accident. Everyone else (including security) had to stay outside a cordon that was literally miles upwind and downwind.

20. RE: 15

They were unaware of it because they thought it was a sensor malfunction and didn't know that there was actually water in the system.

19. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

"Nice trolling Chris. Wikipedia is a website created by and for 12-year olds who can't afford Encyclopedia Britannica. Also, this was posted courtesy of United States Air Force, published on: July 14, 2008. So go update your wikipedia article, that's what's your supposed to do. Keep wiki updated and stay in school!" People who look down on wikipedia disgust me. Sure, it's not perfect, but it's pretty damn good for an open and free project. Please, continue wasting your money on your BriTANNica (correcting your spelling mistake. Fool, learn to spell before insulting great ideas like Wikipedia.

18. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

actually the airbus crash at Mulhouse in France was solely down to pilot error. The pilot had overridden the flight computers power increase demand, to remain low during a low pass with undercart up. When the pilot then throttled up as he approached the trees, he'd left it too late, if you listen to the viedo you can hear the engines winding up just as he starts lopping the tops off the firs. Dont blame the machine when its got an idiot in charge. Nice pics BTW - better angles than seen before.

17. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Assuming the posted Timeline account is accurate, it sounds as though someone (ground crew perhaps) did not follow a protocol. Why would you recalibrate a sensor that has a heater without first testing the heater, or any other feature of the sensor, to see if the malfunction clears? If there is any underlying cause for the malfunctioning sensor (not just water), recalibration is going to create serious problems (see pictures above).

16. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Actually, this isn't the first time this type of accident has happened. There was an Airbus doing a low speed pass several years ago. When the pilot told the aircraft to pull up. The computer didn't and they crashed into trees. So, for those who said we should send the people who screwed up to Alaska. Well the machine that screwed up is now dead. Unfortunately, we build airplanes that people can't fly so computers have to. When you put a computer between the pilot and machine there are going to be these types of issues. But, that won't keep these to pilots from being shafted.

15. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

don't understand why the pilot was not aware of the recalibration - should have been logged. If they were, this could have been avoided! your tax dollars at work...

14. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Some researchers believe carbon nano-tubes may cause cancer in the same way asbestos does. "Has it not been determined that inhaled carbon fiber poses a health risk similar to asbestos? "

13. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Be careful about believing stuff you pick up on line. But don't necessarily discount it, either.

12. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Chris, you are a genius. Your logic is infallible, and your conclusions are brilliant. "Although these are very good pictures they all seem like they were photoshopped. I don't believe any of this story. I checked this out on wikipedia and they don't have these pictures. Must not be true then. Chris"

11. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Has it not been determined that inhaled carbon fiber poses a health risk similar to asbestos? With such damage to the airframe there certainly would have been lots if loose carbon fiber in the area. Perhaps that is the reason for the airmasks and contamination suits. (ps to Chris.... certainly hope you are kidding about Wikipedia!)

10. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Has it not been determined that inhaled carbon fiber poses a health risk similar to asbestos? With such damage to the airframe there certainly would have been lots if loose carbon fiber in the area. Perhaps that is the reason for the airmasks and contamination suits. (ps to Chris.... certainly hope you are kidding about Wikipedia!)

9. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Nice trolling Chris. Wikipedia is a website created by and for 12-year olds who can't afford Encyclopedia Britannica. Also, this was posted courtesy of United States Air Force, published on: July 14, 2008. So go update your wikipedia article, that's what's your supposed to do. Keep wiki updated and stay in school!

8. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

My god Chris, you're absolutely correct. If wikipedia doesn't have the photos, then there is no way any other news source could have possibly gotten an exclusive on the crash photos. So they MUST be photoshopped then!!

7. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

"I don't believe any of this story." Let me guess--the government did it!

6. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Can we make the people that screwed up pay for the damage? Or at least retire them or transfer them to a remote post in Alaska?

5. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Website: homelessokc.blogspot.com

<http://blog.wired.com/defense/2008/06/video-stealth-b.html> Then what about this video,skeptic photoshop Chris.Must not be real,why?the story?

4. Great photo

Website: <http://www.all-acronyms.com>

Very strong first image.

3. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Whoops. \$1.4bn mistake.

2. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Website: popularmechanics.com

A billion dollar plane destroyed but more important is the fact that the pilots survived.

1. RE: B-2 Stealth Bomber Crash Scene Photos: Exclusive First Look

Although these are very good pictures they all seem like they were photoshopped. I don't believe any of this story. I checked this out on wikipedia and they don't have these pictures. Must not be true then. Chris

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