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B-17 (PB-1G) Lifeboat

The majestic and famous Boeing B-17 "Flying Fortress" joined the Coast Guard's aircraft inventory beginning in 1945. After the war, the Coast Guard realized the need for a long range search and rescue aircraft to supplement its peace-time SAR capabilities. Concurrently, the Army Air Force was retiring thousands of the four-engine bombers, many still "factory-new" as they were delivered too late to see action. The Coast Guard, always quick to take advantage of anything they could get inexpensively, requested that the Army Air Force loan eighteen of the bombers to the Coast Guard. The powerful, long-legged and stable bombers proved to be excellent additions to the Coast Guard's aviation fleet.

The Army Air Force had developed a lifeboat that was slung underneath the fuselage of a B-17 that would be dropped to survivors in the water. A parachute rig would deploy from the lifeboat after its release and allow it to descend safely to the surface. The Coast Guard adopted the lifeboat for many of its PB-1Gs (the naval designation for the Flying Fortress). Additionally, these aircraft were also used for the International Ice Patrol while another of the versatile PB-1Gs was modified to carry a nine-lens, 1.5 million dollar, aerial camera for mapping purposes. Interestingly, the Norden bombsight, used by the B-17's in their bombing campaign against Nazi Germany, was kept with this PB-1G and used to pinpoint targets for the camera.

The PB-1Gs served with the Coast Guard from 1945 through 1959. The final flight of the last PB-1G in Coast Guard service ended at 1:46 p.m. on Wednesday 14 October 1959 when PB-1G 77254 landed at AIRSTA Elizabeth City . She had faithfully served the nation's oldest continuous sea service for fourteen years.