

AF Seeks Operational Data on Firebee

• Tests at Holloman will provide information for setting up jet drone squadrons in the field.

Ryan Aeronautical Co.'s Firebee is now undergoing "operational suitability testing" at Holloman Air Development Center, N. M.

Although actual operations are conducted at Holloman, the OST phase of the Firebee program is in the hands of the Air Force Operational Test Center of the Air Proving Ground, Eglin AFB, Fla.

This work on the pilotless jet target drone is concurrent with the research and development phase now nearing completion. It aims at developing the actual capabilities and possible applications of the Firebee, and will provide the data for setting up operational Firebee squadrons.

► **Launch From B-26**—The wing-launch method is used in Firebee OST missions. The drone rides in specially designed racks mounted at the outboard wing bomb shackles of a Douglas B-26, and is fired off by means of the electric bomb salvo switch.

In early work, only one Firebee was mounted. A water ballast tank was used under the other wing. Now the ballast tank has been removed, and two launchings can be accomplished on each mission. After the first launching, the B-26 mother ship circles out of range until parachute recovery of the drone is complete, then returns to the range for the second.

Until launching, an airman in the B-26 monitors the "bird." Once free, control is taken over on the ground, where a plotting board shows the target's path and altitude. Ground has control of the Firebee's maneuvers and the parachute recovery system by means of a "black box."

► **Reports From F-86**—An F-86 chase plane accompanies the drone, to report via VHF voice radio on the craft's behavior in flight. It is planned to eliminate the chase plane in the future, to get conditions more nearly like those under which jet drone operational groups will work.

Responsibility for the OST mission rests with the 3225th Drone Squadron of Air Proving Ground's 3205th Drone Group.



B-26 MOTHER SHIP carries two Ryan Firebees, one under each wing, in Holloman tests. Pilotless target drones are released by means of electric bomb salvo switch.



BIRD ON THE WING get final adjustment in wing launch rack. Tiger face sets off OST Firebees from Ryan target drones undergoing R&D tests at Holloman center.



SAFE ON GROUND after parachute drop, Firebee waits for Air Force crane and trailer to pick it up, after which B-26 mother ship will launch second drone.