

The SB-29 'Super Dumbo' was a version of the B-29 adapted for air rescue duty after World War II. Sixteen 29s were modified to carry a droppable A-3 lifeboat under the fuselage; the SB-29 was used mainly as rescue support for air units that flew long distances over water. With the exception of the forward lower gun turret, all defensive armament was retained. They also carried a variety of radio equipment, provisions, survival kits, and extra crew. It was used throughout the Korean War into the mid-1950s. It received its nickname from 'Dumbo', the name given by B-29 pilots to the rescue planes who picked them up when they crashed at sea.

The A-3 lifeboat was developed by the EDO Corporation in 1947 as a successor to the A-1 airborne lifeboat built by Higgins and for carrying by the SB-17H Flying Fortress.

EDO built this lifeboat of aluminum alloy for carrying by the SB-29 Superfortress. Approximately 100 of these lifeboats were built (recognition marking A-3 501 and upwards). This lifeboat has a length of 30' 9/16" and a weight attached to plane of 2736 lb. 15 men could be rescued by the lifeboat.

It was powered by an four-cylinder four-cycle Meteor 20 petrol engine (Red Wing Motor Company). With an Ailsa Craig propeller it was scheduled to give a speed of 8 knots under Stillwater conditions.

The airborne lifeboat was dropped from the SB-29 on a single 100-foot parachute. It was self-righting and had a boarding ladder. The rescued crew had food and water available. There are only some rare reports of successful rescue missions with the A-3 lifeboat, for example with A-3 522.

Lifeboat A-3 603 is still under restoration at the National Museum of the USAF. They are looking for anyone with technical expertise, parts, etc., to contact them. (Above information and phofos from the National Museum of the USAF www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/)

Airdrop of A-3
lifeboat from SB-29

