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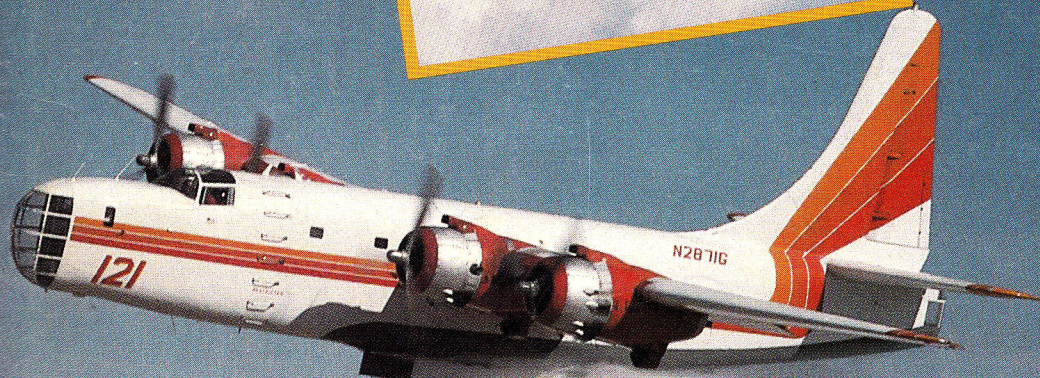


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BOMBERS OF GREYBULL

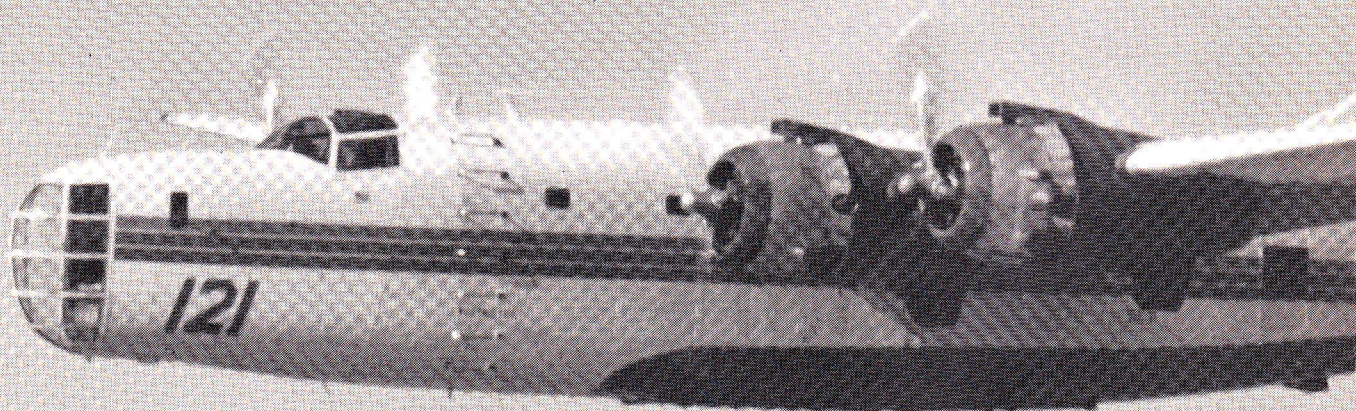
*We visit with the Privateers
of Hawkins & Powers*

WAR ASSETS

*Historian W.T. Larkins presents an
exclusive look at how and why the US
government disposed of its vast fleet of WWII aircraft*

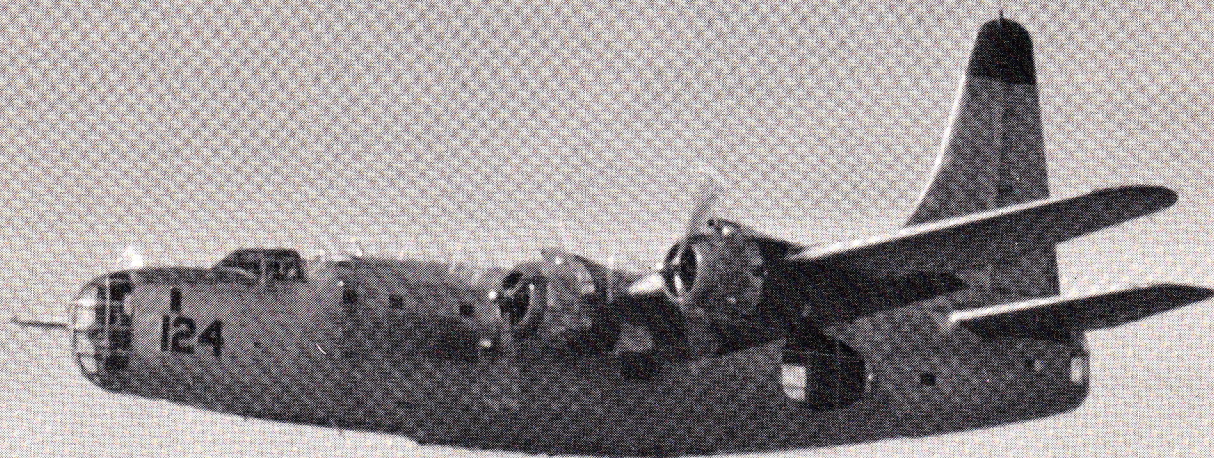
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THE BOMBERS

Magnificent sight of the three Privateers heading toward the drop area.



*We visit with Hawkins & Powers Aviation and fly
with their historic PB4Y-2 Privateers*

BY MICHAEL O'LEARY

During September 1991, near the tiny hamlet of Shell, Wyoming, population 50, paleontologists began the painstaking excavation of a once-fearsome creature known as *Allosaurus fragilis*. Preserved as a nearly intact fossilized skeleton, the *allosaurs* were once the dominant carnivore of the late Jurassic period in North America. About twice as tall as the average man, these quick-moving eating machines made life difficult for smaller and less-mobile creatures. Functioning about 80 million years before the more famous *Tyrannosaurus rex*, the *allosaurs* featured the same jaw — full of serrated teeth about the size of small steak knives. Dubbed “Big Al” by the excavation crew, this remarkable find will probably unlock a number of long-hidden secrets by researchers at Montana State University who hauled the remains to their laboratory on a truck. “If you lived in the Jurassic, you wouldn’t want to see an *allosaurus*,” stated paleontologist Pat Leiggi.

In 1945, if you were a Japanese sailor in the Pacific, you would not want to see the sight of a Consolidated PB4Y-2 Privateer, huge bomb bay doors agape, roaring in for an attack against your vessel. Although certainly not as remote as the Jurassic, the aerial dinosaurs of World War Two are a small and endangered collection at best. Yet, just a few miles to the west of Shell is the small town of Greybull (population 1800) and the town’s single-runway airport harbors five Privateer survivors of this important

OF GREYBULL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL O'LEARY

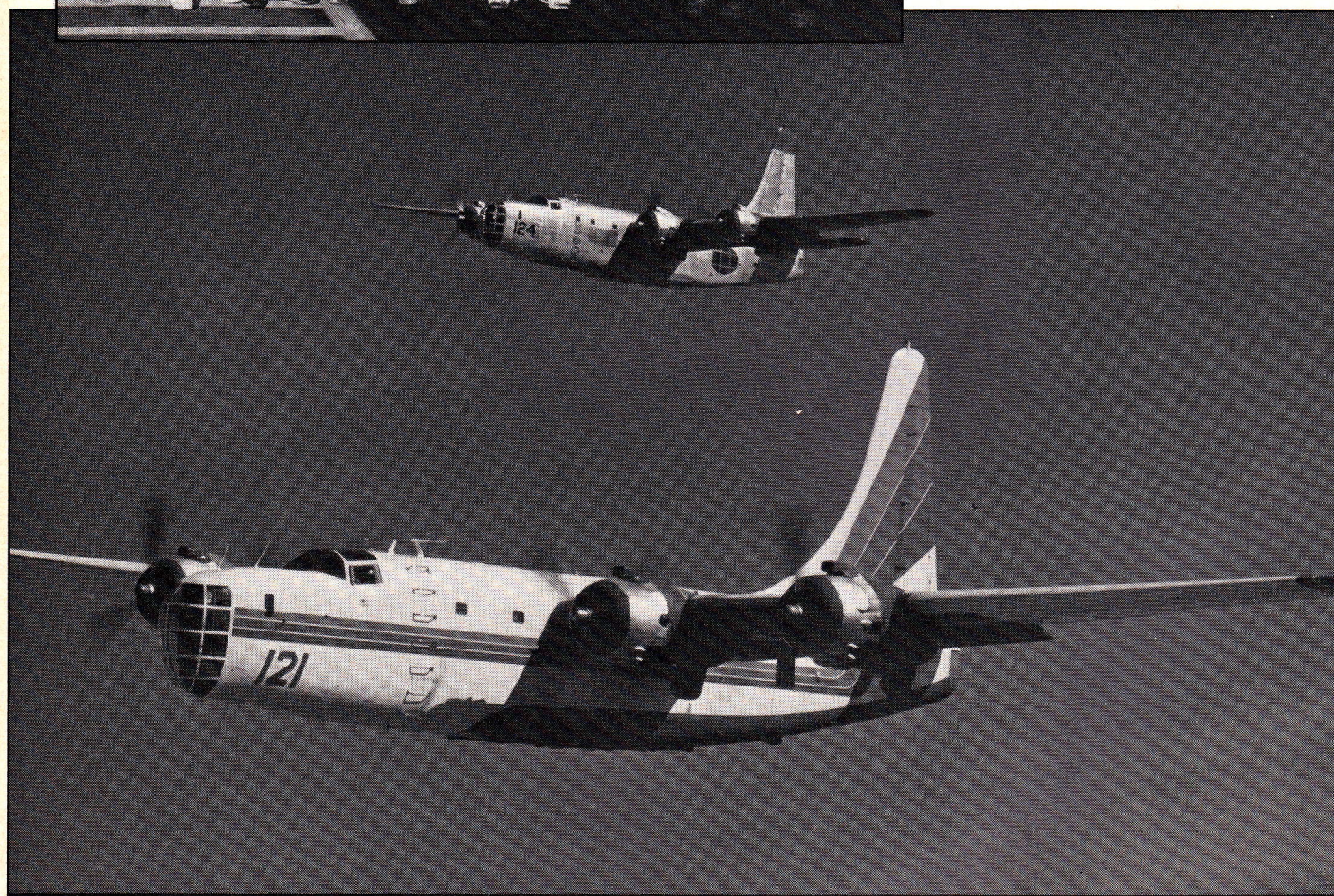


were Pratt & Whitney R-1830-94s without turbosuperchargers and were fitted in new nacelles. JATO bottles could be added to the fuselage and an imposing armament of twelve .50-caliber Browning air-cooled machine guns was distributed in an Erco nose turret, two Martin dorsal turrets, two huge Erco side blisters, and a Motor Products tail turret.

The first three PB4Y-2s were converted

Greybull wild bunch: Privateer crews for our three-plane formation drop included: (from the left) Milo Peltzer, copilot, and Bob West, pilot, for Tanker 121; Gene Powers, pilot, and Mark Powers, copilot, for 124; Tim Mikus, copilot, and Duane Powers, pilot, for 126. They did a great job!

The powerful lines of the Privateer are well-illustrated in this view of Tankers 121 and 124. Virtually all Privateer air attack operations are flown with the flaps lowered to improve handling qualities.



period in history and these five PB4Y-2s are currently the only flying examples of their type. In their own way, the Privateers are just as important in defining their period of history as the recently unearthed *allosaurus*.

That these magnificent four-engine former patrol bombers still survive and fly is due to the perseverance of Gene Powers and his crew at Hawkins & Powers Aviation. Before we get into that story, let's first take a look at the Privateer itself. During the war, the Navy operated the PB4Y-1, which was

basically a stock USAAF B-24 with appropriate naval gear added. However, the USN wanted their own low-altitude heavy patrol bomber and contracted with Consolidated in San Diego to produce such a craft. Initially known as the Sea Liberator, the new aircraft was a considerable departure from the B-24. While incorporating the same outer wing and landing gear as the B-24, the PB4Y-2 (Consolidated Model 100) featured a fuselage that was lengthened by seven feet and a large single vertical tail. The engines

from existing PB4Y-1 airframes and initially retained their distinctive twin vertical tails. The first example flew on 20 September 1943. After initial flight testing, an order was given on 15 October for the delivery of 660 aircraft which had by now been designated as Privateers. This order was followed by another for 770 airframes about one year later. Consolidated began delivering aircraft in March 1944 and production extended to October 1945 but was limited to a total of 740 Privateers by the successful



Aerial view of part of the H&P ramp showing two PB4Y-2s taxiing amid a variety of other air attack aircraft, including Boxcars, Neptune, and Hercules.

conclusion of the war.

The first operational squadrons to receive the type comprised VPB-118 and -119 who took their Privateers overseas beginning in January 1945. The planes began operating out of Tinian, searching for enemy subs, shipping, aircraft, and land targets. By the end of the Pacific War, the Navy was operating 13 Privateer squadrons while five other squadrons flew a mixture of Privateers and PB4Y-1s.

After WWII, the Privateer stayed in front-line use and three squadrons (VP-772, VP-871, and VP-28) saw action in the Korean War where, carrying 250 parachute flares apiece, they flew in support of Marine night operations against the enemy. After Korea, Privateers were used for a variety of secondary missions including conversion to drones and drone directors. The US Coast Guard also used a small number of Privateers modified for search and rescue duties.

A few Privateers were also used by foreign nations, the most notable being France, which initially received ten PB4Y-2 aircraft in late 1950 for use against communist insurgents in French Indochina. The aircraft were used as bombers and several were lost in action, but more Privateers were supplied

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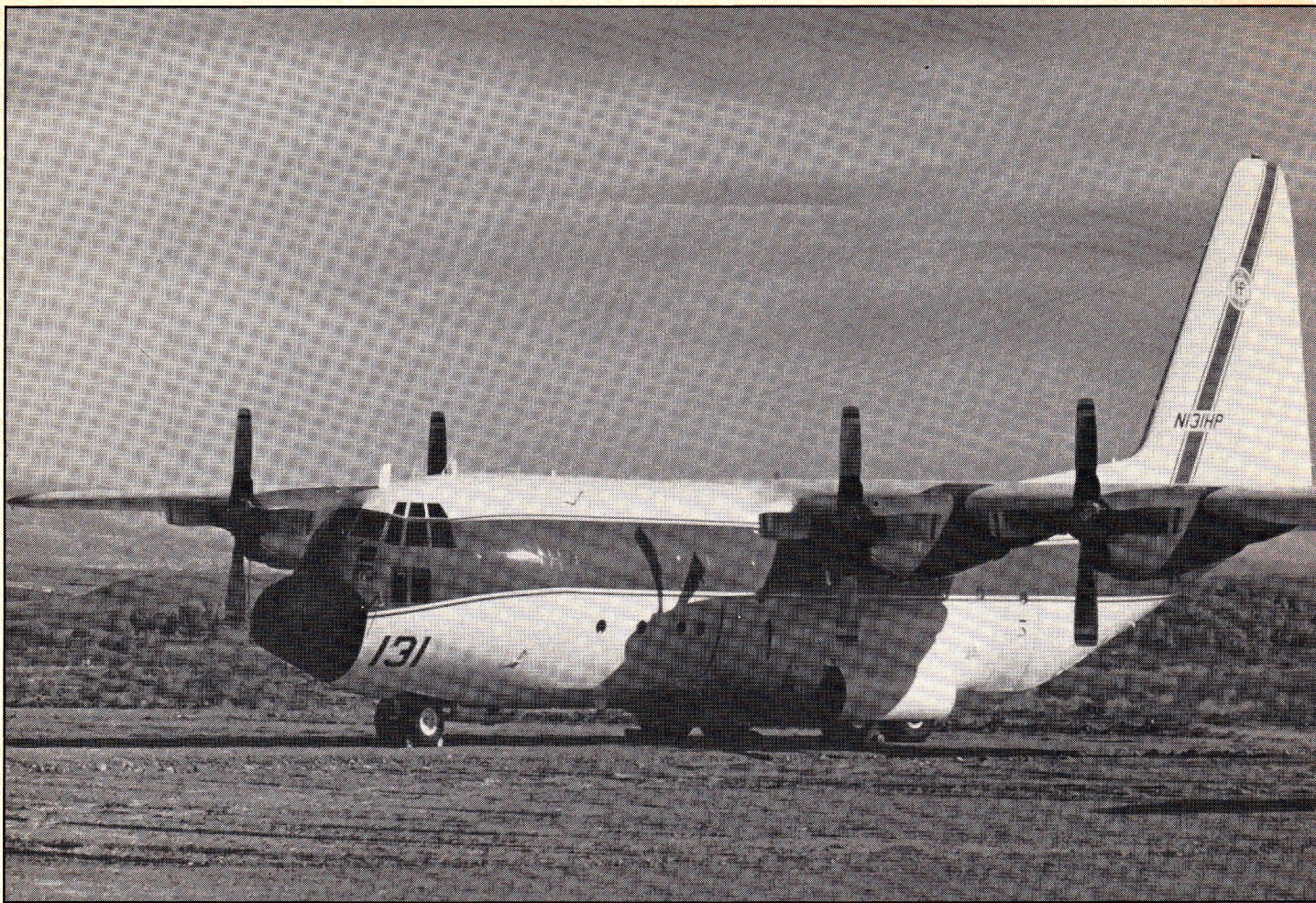
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Hercules tankers are now coming into operation all over the country, and H&P is no exception. Tanker 131 N131HP is seen on the ramp in the company's new color scheme which was designed by Gene's wife.



Gene Powers (left) discusses a 1961 tanker mission with a friend at Medford, Oregon, in a PV-2 Ventura. "Flown correctly at low altitudes, the Harpoon could show a clean pair of heels to an A-26," states Gene.

from US stocks and the French eventually received 24 planes. After the French defeat in Indochina, the aircraft saw action in the Algerian war of independence before the last five examples were withdrawn and scrapped in 1961.

During the late 1950s, surplus Privateers were made available to civilian buyers during sales at Litchfield Park, Arizona. Quite

a few aircraft were sold, but the majority were rapidly scrapped or abandoned since they were being purchased for their -94 engines only. At this time, the engines (which were being used for "super" DC-3 civilian transport conversions) were more valuable than the airframes. However, a Restricted Certificate (AR-29) was obtained by Trans-aire Spraying Co. of Canyon, Texas, to

register civilian Privateers as large acreage sprayers and fire bombers.

During World War Two, a teenager worked on his family's farm in Sheridan, Wyoming, but his attention was often drawn skyward by flights of military training aircraft droning overhead as pilots practiced on cross-country outings. "I was fascinated by those things going overhead," said Gene Powers as he sat in his comfortable office at the Greybull Airport. The second-floor office has lots of windows and they look out over the Hawkins & Powers empire which includes acres of nearly extinct, multi-engine, propeller-driven aircraft. Powers is a legend in aviation, but his start at a flying career was a bit chancy.

"If my dad had a tractor, things might have turned out different," stated the red-bearded Powers. "However, I was stuck behind a damn horse and plough so the attraction of those airplanes was pretty big."



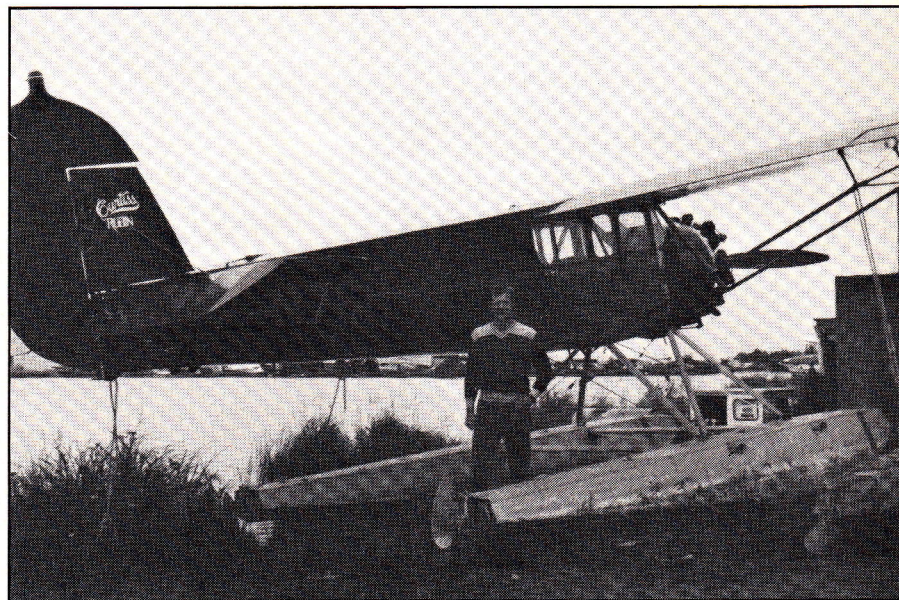
planes for room and board and began getting a few flights. At 15, I faked my age and joined the Navy.

"I was sent to North Island Naval Air Station in California and went through all the Navy training programs and eventually wound up as a plane captain on PB4Y-2s." This wartime indoctrination would serve Powers well and would firmly cement a tie with the long-range patrol bomber.

When the war ended, Gene used his GI bill to go to the University of Wyoming where he studied to become an aeronautical engineer. During this time, he resumed his flying at the local airport. "Guys were makin' some good money doing spray work

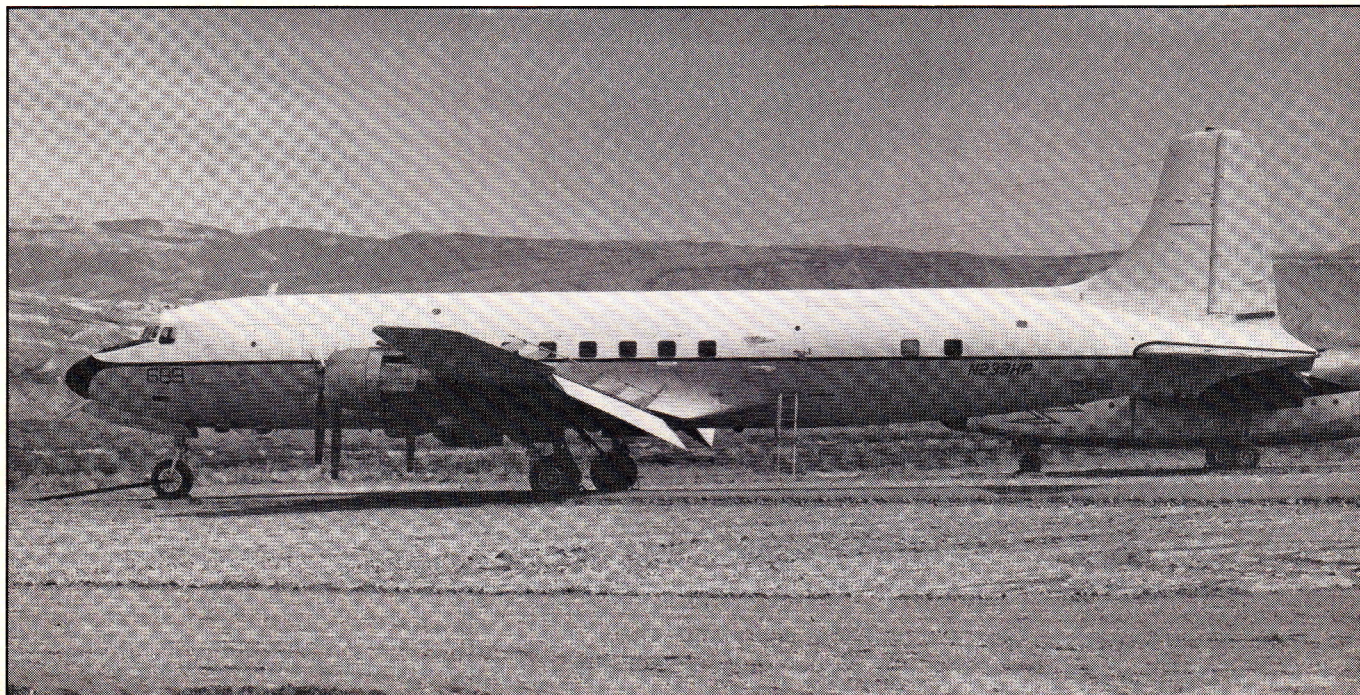
so I bought a Curtiss Robin, yanked off the old Challenger engine, and put on a 220 horse Continental," recalled Gene. "I learned to weld, put a tank in the fuselage, added spray bars and went spraying. I was a punk-ass kid, weighed 150 pounds — the lighter the better, since I could carry more of a load in the plane. I loved planes and flying and I was also making money. What could have been better?

"I was doin' some work for the Yentzer brothers at the time and I flew all through school, getting \$300 a month for my trouble, which I thought was pretty great," said Powers. "Dick Yentzer was the first Navy pilot to shoot down a German aircraft dur-



Duane Powers with Curtiss Robin N76H — his father's first aircraft which they discovered a few years back in an Alaskan aviation museum.

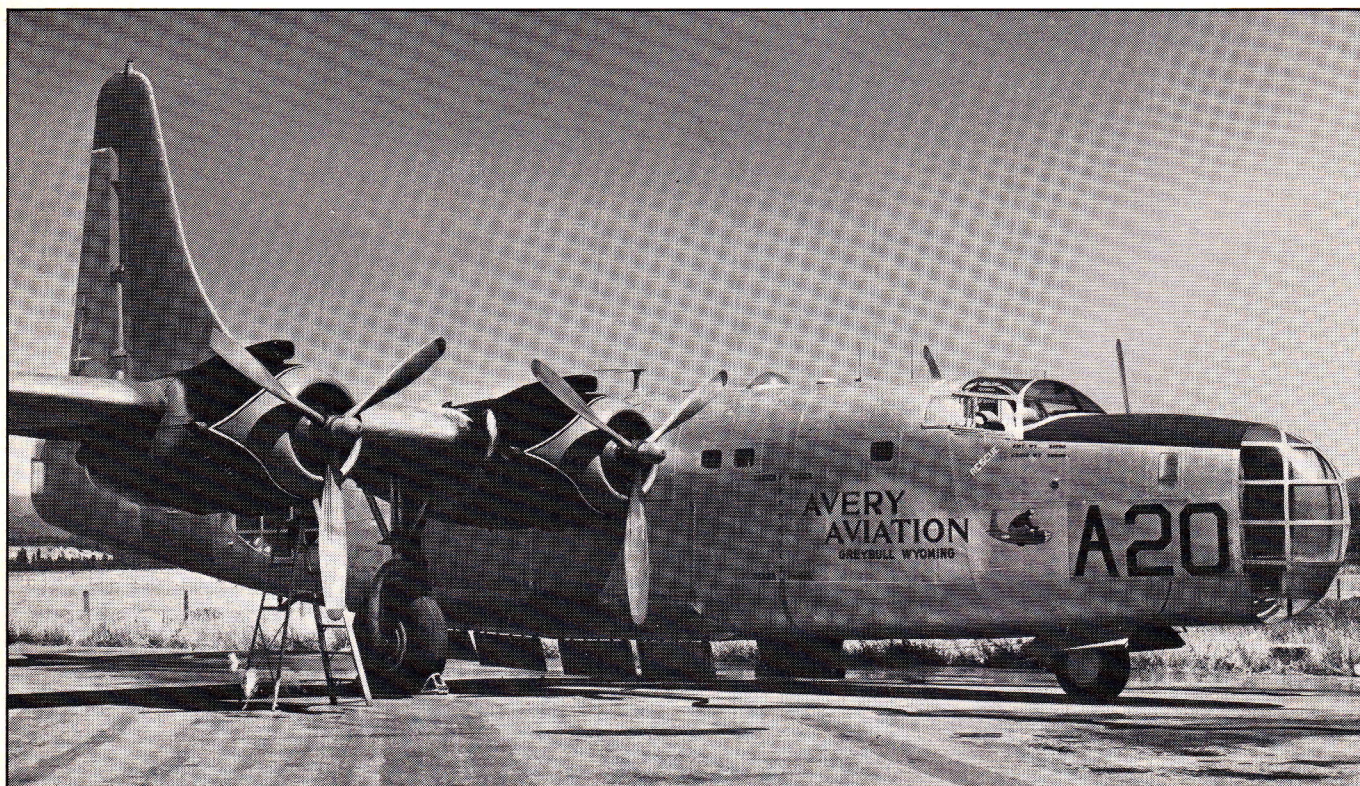
"We were close to an airport and both my brothers went into the Army Air Force," recalled Powers. "I sort of ran away from home and went to the airport where I lived in the rafters of the hangar and washed



H&P also operates two Douglas C-118s as large-area sprayers. Still wearing its basic US Navy paint, N233HP is seen in storage as it awaits its next job.



Aerial view gives some idea of the scope of H&P's operations out of Greybull.



An Avery Aviation Privateer as Tanker A20 and photographed at West Yellowstone, Montana, during August 1969. (Milo Peltzer)

ing WWII. He and his brother, Jack, had built up a good spraying business and were modifying all sorts of planes including Cubs and Luscombes. Like most other airports at

the time, there were a bunch of Fairchild PT-19s and PT-23s rotting being the hangar and these served as parts bins — in fact, I got my Continental off one of the -23s.

About this time, I decided to put my new-found aeronautical engineering knowledge to use and began sketching out plans for a Cub sprayer. The RCAF was surplusng

145 horse Menasco engines for \$400, so I thought about putting one of those on a Cub. I built up some 2x4s, added the engine, but by the time I got the center of gravity straight, the engine was two feet forward of the firewall. So, I went behind the hangar, yanked a Ranger off a PT and put it on the Cub. I added Whitaker tandem gear and

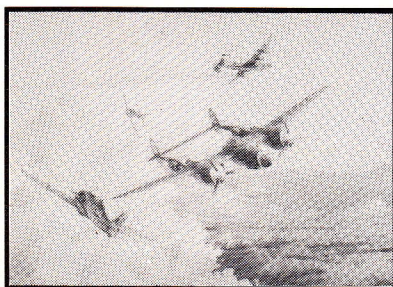
put another set of Cub wings on the lower fuselage, staggered ahead of the upper wings. I added the tank and spray system and, with that Ranger, the damn thing would nearly go straight up. Slowed down, the plane could get treacherous, but it just took a goose of the throttle and you were out of trouble."

No matter what he was flying, Gene always wanted more power. "When the Pacer came out, we went back to Lock Haven and bought a new Super Cub with no engine. We then added a Pacer QEC which had 125 horses and it made the Super Cub into a real performer."

(Continued on page 64)



Bob West rolls Tanker 121 in on final to South Big Horn Airport. West is the senior pilot for H&P and the only pilot qualified in all the company's tankers.



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