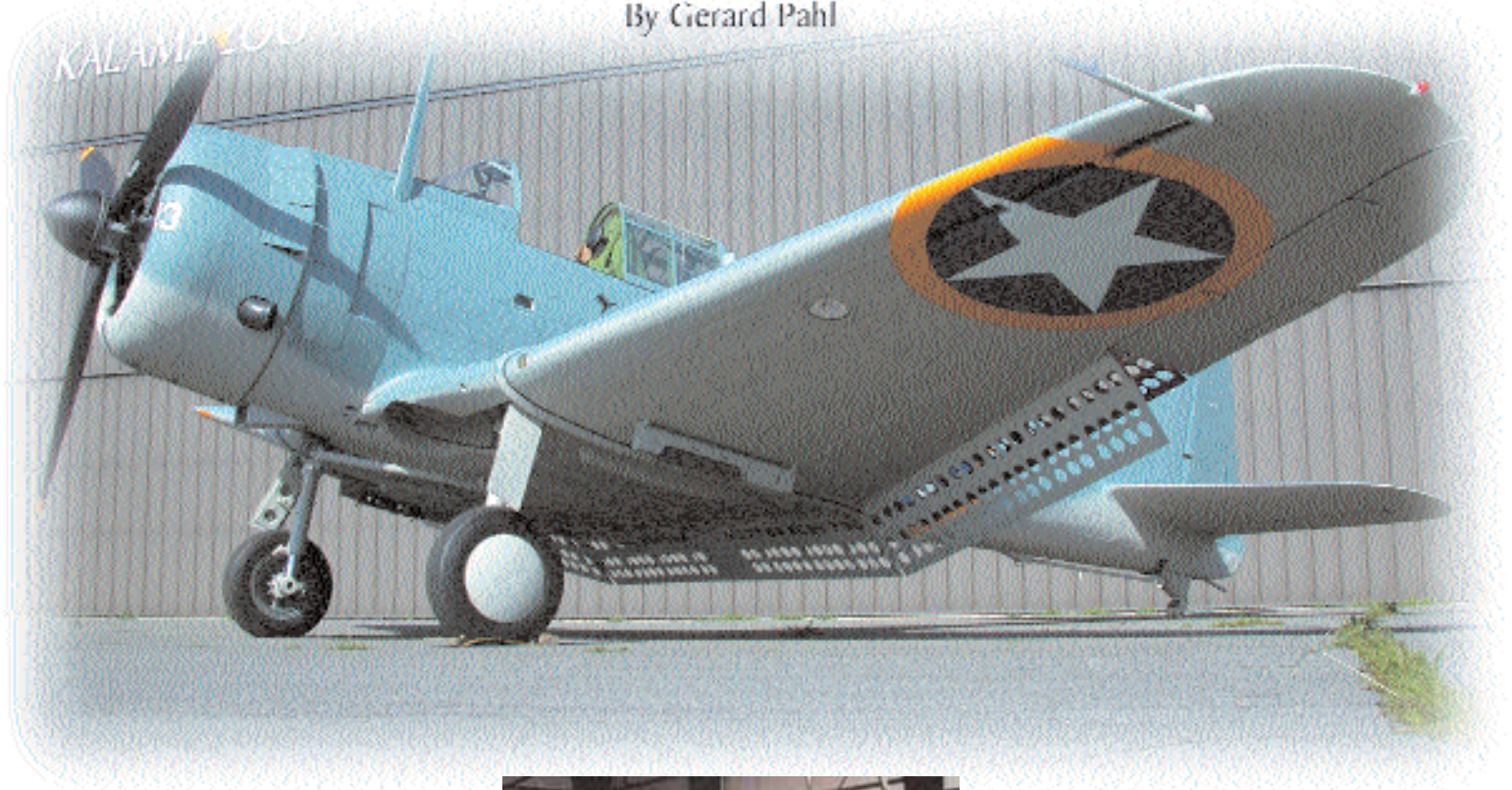


DAUNTLESS REBORN

By Gerard Pahl



Some people travel to frigid Greenland to retrieve aircraft from beneath 250 feet of glacial ice. Others go to the sweltering jungles of New Guinea to bring them back. The National Museum of Naval Aviation, Pensacola, Fla., went to the bottom of Lake Michigan to recover a Douglas SBD-3 *Dauntless*, and the Michigan-based Kalamazoo Aviation History Museum, along with the national Guadalcanal Memorial Museum, are the beneficiaries. After years of fundraising and negotiation, this aircraft was brought to the “Air Zoo” in early November 1993. The dive-bomber is probably most noted for its work in the Pacific, especially during the Battle of Midway where its type sank three major Japanese aircraft carriers and damaged a fourth.

Divers retrieved SBD BuNo 06624 from the freshwater lake



The SBD-3 *Dauntless* retrieved from the depths of Lake Michigan by the National Museum of Naval Aviation was a shadow of its former self, above center. A painstaking restoration by the Kalamazoo Air Zoo, above, restored the plane to its former glory, top. Opposite page, the SBD sits on the tarmac with a modern squadronmate, an F/A-18E *Super Hornet*.

where it crashed near Naval Air Station Glenview, Ill., on 19 September 1943. After sustaining damage in a landing accident and being underwater for 50 years, the *Dauntless* was in very poor condition. To prevent further corrosion, power sprayers were used to remove muck and silt from the aircraft, which was then completely disassembled. All of the parts were cleaned and oiled to preserve them.

While the restoration team, led by Air Zoo members Greg Ward and Rick Johnson, planned the rebuilding of the aircraft, museum volunteer Richard Bauer researched the history of BuNo 06624. Assigned to the *Tophatters* of Scouting Squadron 41 on 12 September 1942, the aircraft played an important role in supporting U.S. forces off Africa’s west coast while operating from *Ranger* (CV 4).

After dismantling the aircraft at the museum in 1994, a decision was made to rebuild it to static condition. On long-term loan from the Navy, it was unlikely that it would be allowed to fly. Even so, the personnel carrying out the restoration are perfectionists and they replaced parts that no one would ever see, including wiring, cables and other interior equipment. Restoring the propeller, spinner, cowling and the entire engine took almost eight years of devoted labor. Both damaged wings also had to be restored, but one of the biggest challenges was rebuilding the flaps and dive brakes. A special mold had to be made to accomplish the task.

The fuselage was completely stripped, all corrosion removed and some new skin added. The tail wheel was gone, but one was found at an auction on eBay. The landing gear was restored, magnesium wheels replaced, cockpit renovated and the canopy manufactured. All exterior painting, including insignia and other markings, was completed on the *Dauntless* for a dedication ceremony at the Air Zoo on 11 May. The original pilot of BuNo 06624, E. F. Anderson, was unable to attend the

As of May 2002, the Director of Naval History, who has management responsibility of all historic, sunken naval aircraft, requires a permit for recovery of sunken aircraft. Applicants must include a feasible and comprehensive plan for recovery, conservation, safety and addressing environmental concerns. For more information contact the Underwater Archaeology Branch of the Naval Historical Center at 202-433-7562 (DSN 288-7562).

ceremony, but his son and grandson attended and posed for photos in the cockpit of the restored SBD.

A fitting tribute took place on 30 May when F/A-18 *Hornets* from today's *Tophatters* of Strike Fighter Squadron 14 flew in to meet a WW II ancestor.

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