

Dive-bomber historian Peter C. Smith uncovers the last traces of a 'forgotten' type, the capable Vultee Vengeance.

# The last Vengeance

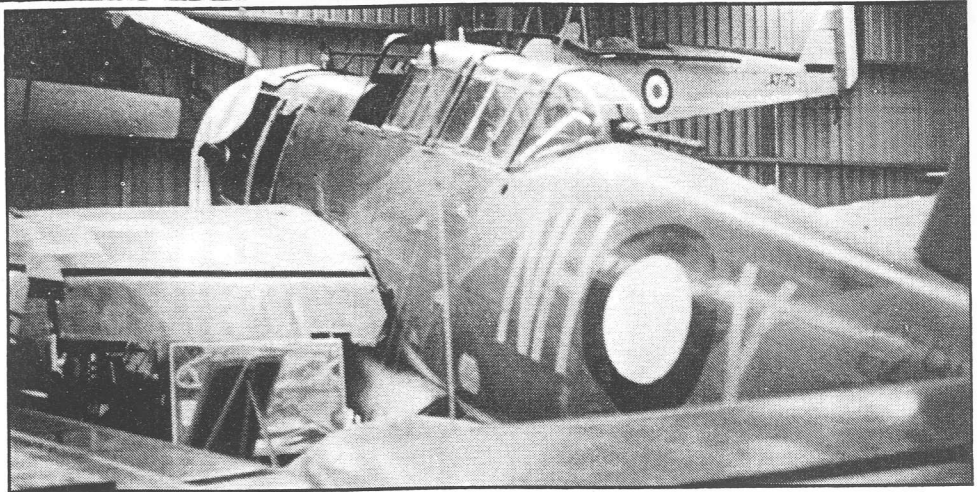
HAVING just completed the first full-length book on the 'forgotten' dive-bomber of World War Two, the Vultee Vengeance, I discovered much hitherto unknown material on this aircraft. Of special interest to *FlyPast* readers is the fact that two have survived and are now being actively brought back to their former glory.

The Vultee Vengeance (variously the V-72, A-31, A-35) dive-bomber was designed, built and tested in California, USA. Although an American aircraft through and through the Vengeance was originally conceived as a result of a request for a dive-bomber by a French Mission to the USA, with the deadly results of the famed Junkers Ju 87 Stuka staring them in the face after Spain and Poland.

Before the concept could come to fruition France fell to the same aircraft which spearheaded the *Blitzkrieg*. Britain stood alone, expecting daily the German army to storm ashore and repeat the process. Her aircraft factories were committed in the main to turning out the fighters which won the Battle of Britain. She had few real dive-bombers of her own, only America, the 'Arsenal of Democracy', seemed to offer hope of obtaining quickly a dive-bomber to do the German invaders what they had been doing to the rest of Europe.

It was that ruthless Canadian, Lord Beaverbrook, who, as Minister for Aircraft Production, slashed through red tape to place orders for dive-bombers with the young Vultee firm. Famed designer, Richard Palmer, had assembled a strong team of like-minded frontier-breaking young men to translate his ideas into the ultimate dive-bomber.

With the British orders the work was pressed ahead at full speed. So urgent was the need that the contracts included in them the funds to expand the company into Nashville Tennessee. In addition the new



Narellan's example, EZ999 'NH-V', is kept in cramped conditions. It is hoped to take her to at least taxiing status. (David Wilson).

Northrop Corporation was brought in to sub-contract the Vengeance on its own lines and this set the company off on the right path.

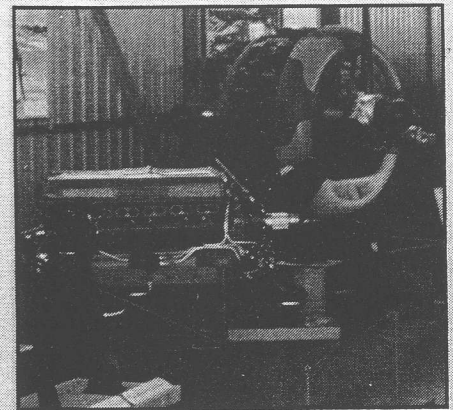
Much that was new to aircraft design and construction first appeared in the Vengeance. Special wing-form and construction techniques gave this aircraft a unique strength and sturdiness. Nil angle of incidence meant that it was the only dive-bomber designed from the outset for vertical attacks. Trim-tabs incorporated made it the simplest of all dive-bombers to turn and control in the dive.

When it reached squadron service it served in the front line with four squadrons of the RAF and two squadrons of the Indian Air Force in Burma and also with five squadrons of the RAAF in Timor and New Guinea. Its accuracy was phenomenal, its losses negligible.

It also served with the air forces of the USA, France and Brazil and the Navies of both America and Great Britain.

So, do any Vultee Vengeances survive? Well yes, there is one almost whole one preserved in a museum in Australia, several mounted engines on display at civilian airports in the same country and a large collection of parts and pieces, which it is hoped will one day be re-assembled for a second Vengeance, again in Australia.

Twenty years ago there were persistent hints of an almost complete Vengeance somewhere in either India or in what is now



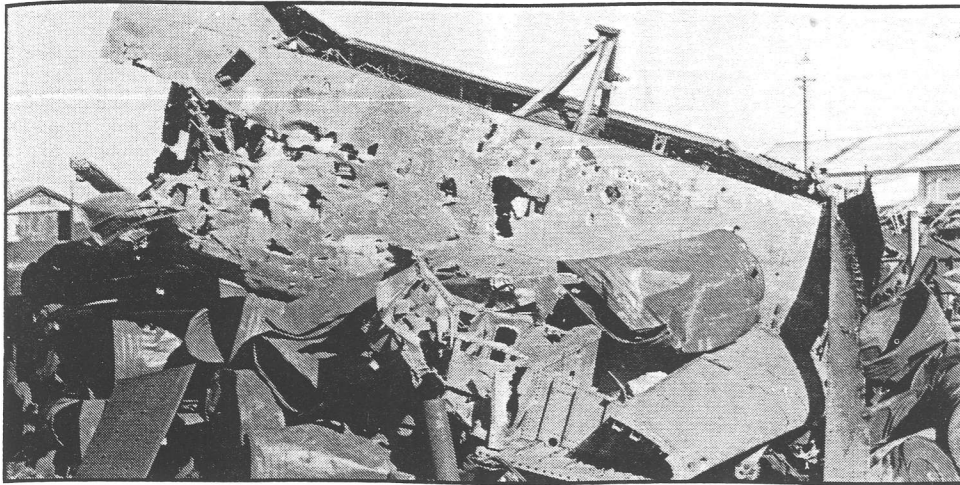
Vengeance Cyclone engine on display at RAAFA Museum at Bull Creek. (Frank Purser).

Bangladesh. To date nothing has come to light to substantiate this.

Frank Purser, Curator of the Air Force Memorial Estate at Bull Creek, Western Australia, provided details on what remains of approximately thirty Vengeances which were sold like all the other survivors, by the Commonwealth Disposal Commission, in 1951:-

- A collection of damaged and vandalised air-frame assemblies which constitute the major part of A27-247, ex-RAAF. This is minus the bomb-bay doors and a few other pieces.
- The engine and nose cowl from the above aircraft has been restored to display condition, complete with carburettor, magnetos and all accessories together with a propeller, the blades of which are of doubtful authenticity.
- Several major fuselage assemblies, very





*Bull Creek's Vengeance as she arrived from Kalgoorhi, an almost unrecognisable hulk. (Frank Purser).*

badly damaged, rescued from a scrap yard.

● Three Cyclone GR-2600 engines, two of them stripped off all accessories, one of them complete with nose and side cowls, gill flaps, oil cooler and mountings back to the fire wall.

"All these are in the possession of the RAFA Aviation Museum with the restored engine on display. There are no immediate plans to undertake the task of restoring the airframe. There are no decipherable serial numbers on any of the engines or airframe assemblies but A27-247 can be read on the fuselage," says Frank.

David A Saunders takes the story of the latter up to date, "I have taken the Museum's Vengeance to my workshop at home to be rebuilt to a full static display. She is in a bad state and needs a lot of metalwork done to her before she can look her old self again.

"I travel a lot searching for more items for her and the other day I came across six canopies in not bad condition, a real stroke of luck. I have spent twenty years in the aviation game, so with my sheet-metal and engine knowledge I hope I can eventually make her look like the real thing once again."

Another GR-2600 engine is on display at Perth International Airport, without accessories but with nose cowl and propeller. Two of the blades are fibreglass mouldings.

G Jacob, Duty Terminal Manager at Perth International Airport, gave the following information about the engine. "This particular engine was fitted to one of nineteen Vengeance aircraft disposed of at Boulder, Western Australia, in 1947, for the sum of A\$10 each! The aircraft were purchased for their scrap metal value. The engine was later

acquired by the Sport Aircraft Association of Australia, Western Australia Division for A\$40 and subsequently donated to the Department of Aviation Historical Society for restoration.

"This restoration was accomplished with the kind co-operation and assistance of the Sport Aircraft Association, Ansett Airlines of Australia, Universal Plastics, CIBA-GEIGY Australia Ltd, the Air Force Association of Aviation Museum and the Department of Aviation Regional Workshops."

Most complete specimen is that held at the Camden Museum of Aviation, located at Narellan, NSW. This is a privately owned Museum with no state funding and was founded, and is still run and maintained, by Harold, Verna and Alan Thomas. Harold was a former apprentice with Australian National Airways.

All restoration work there is done by the family themselves and a couple of interested volunteers. One of these, who has specialised on the Vengeance, is LAC Wayne Brown from 77 Squadron Engine Section at RAAF Williamtown. He very kindly pro-

vided details of the work conducted on this aircraft.

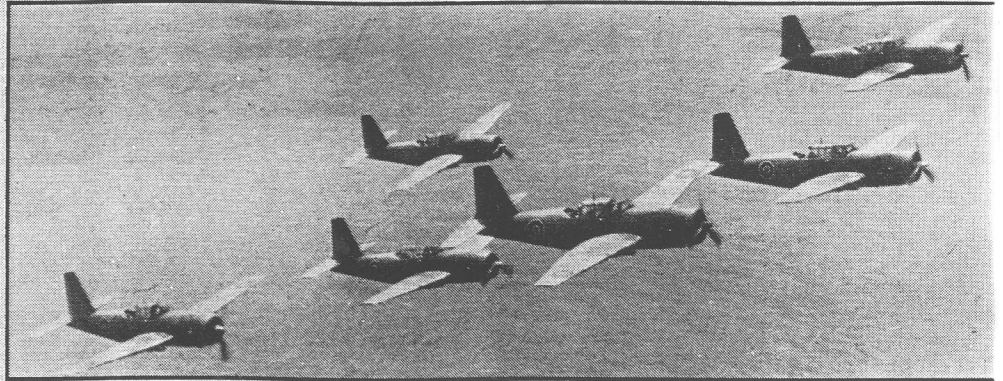
"I am an Aircraft Engine Fitter with the RAAF, currently working on Mirage III O aircraft. Unfortunately due to work commitments I only manage to get down to Camden about once a month. Currently I am attempting to restore the subject aircraft, Vengeance EZ999, to a ground run-able condition. So far I have had little trouble as the engine, although having not run for some thirty years, was in quite remarkable condition.

"This aircraft was the last Mk IA built by Northrop. It did not see active service with the RAAF and spent most of her career being sent from one storage depot to another and as such has very few flying hours under wing. The markings EZ999 now carries are fictitious and the code 'NH-Y' represents the code carried by an aircraft of 12 Squadron RAAF, in late 1943.

"After being disposed of by the RAAF she was used the Sydney Technical College for many years, for training aircraft tradesmen and it is only through this that she survived being scrapped. Eventually, she was obtained by Harold Thomas who stored her in his back yard before restoring her and putting her on display to the public at his museum at Camden Airport. In 1979 the Museum was forced to move from the airport and is now situated a short distance away at Narellan."

The RAAF Historical Section at the Air Force Office Canberra, kindly provided a copy of this aircraft's detail sheet. EZ999 was given Australian serial A27-99 and was received on June 20, 1943. October 30, she was moved into store. On April 27, 1948 it was approved for her to be moved by the Royal Australian Navy but this move was cancelled on June 11, 1948. Instead she was passed to the DAP on the 24th.

It is to be hoped that this unfunded work both at Narellan and Bull Creek, will receive more support both physical and monetary and that both airframes can be fully restored as tangible reminders of the Vultee Vengeance.



*Above: Tight formation grouping from 84 Squadron over Colombo, Ceylon, in 1943. (Arthur Gill).*

*Left: Fresh from the factory at Hawthorne, Northrop sub-contracted Vengeances. (Author's collection).*

