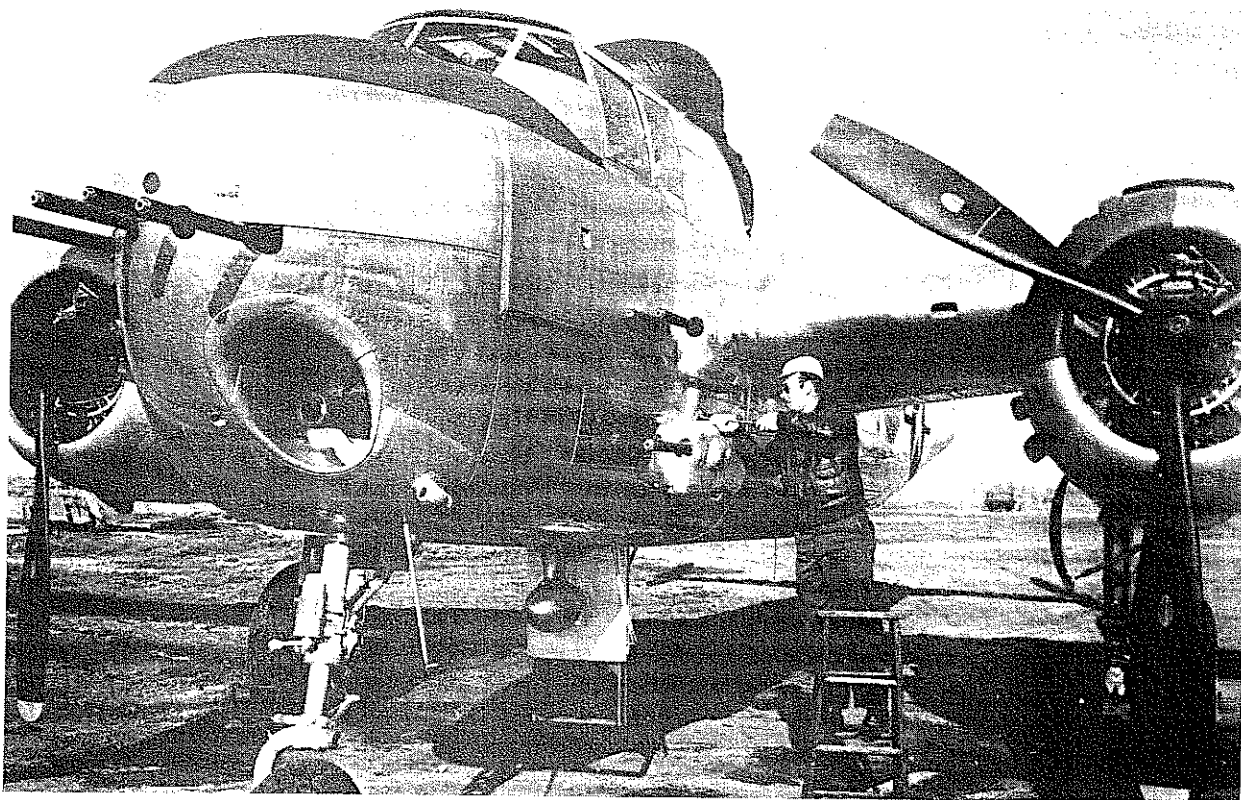


THE CAHA AIRCRAFT COLLECTION - NORTH AMERICAN B-25H MITCHELL



One of the most versatile combat aircraft ever produced, the North American B-25 served in every theater of operations during World War II, from the Aleutians to North Africa. Produced in larger quantities than any other U.S. twin-engine bomber, the B-25 was used in combat throughout the war and, indeed, was still serving as front line equipment in some South American countries as late as the 1970s. And, if for no other reason, the B-25 ranks among the truly historic aircraft of World War II, when in 1942, operating from the carrier HORNET, James Doolittle led 16 Mitchells on an attack of Tokyo, the first use of American airpower against the Japanese homeland in the war.

The B-25 traces its ancestry to a 1938 Army Air Corps circular proposal for a twin-engine medium bomber. North American's entry, the NA-40, promised outstanding performance, although the Air Corps suggested numerous design changes. On September 20, 1939 (shortly after the

start of WW-II) North American was awarded a contract for 184 B-25s, incorporating the recommended changes. As the type was ordered "off the drawing board" there was no XB-25 as such. The first flight of the first B-25 was on August 19, 1940.

By 1941, combat reports from Europe dictated numerous modifications to the B-25. Self sealing fuel tanks and armor protection for the pilots were added and the designation changed to B-25A. About this time the type was officially christened "Mitchell," in honor of the Air Corps leader Billy Mitchell. The first combat unit to receive the Mitchell was the 17th Bombardment Group (Medium) who after Pearl Harbor was diverted to anti-submarine patrols over the Pacific. On December 24, one of their B-25s became the first American twin-engined bombers to sink a Japanese submarine.

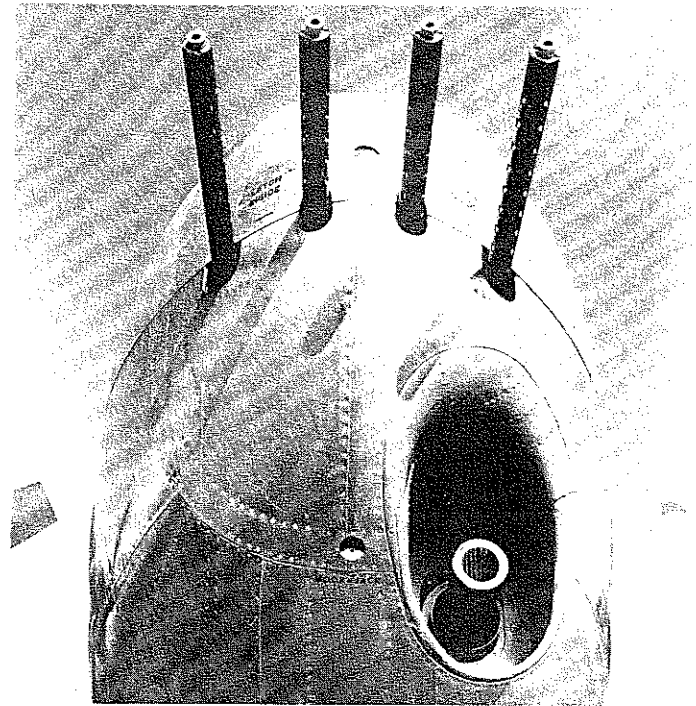
The next major modification, the B-25B, featured extensively revised

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defensive armament, including Bendix power turrets added to the top and bottom of the fuselage, the lower one being fully retractable. Without this defensive armament, this was the type used on the Doolittle attack on the Japanese mainland in April 1942. Sixteen B-25Bs left the USS HORNET to fly the 800 miles to bomb Tokyo and other Japanese cities. All of the B-25s were lost and although the damage they inflicted was relatively minor, the courageous mission gave an incalculable boost to American morale when it was needed most. It also served to demonstrate Japan's vulnerability to aerial attack, which resulted in four first-line fighter groups being retained in the home islands, although urgently needed elsewhere.

Following the widespread use of the B-25 in different theaters of operation, additional combat equipment was added, including the introduction of an autopilot and more powerful engines, resulting in the B-25C which was produced at the Inglewood plant of North American. An additional production line was started at Kansas City, and these models were designated B-25D, essentially similar to the B-25C. The most distinguishable feature of both models was the introduction of individual exhaust stacks attached to each cylinder with special exit fairings incorporated into the cowl skirt sections.

Two B-25Cs were modified to incorporate thermal de-icing systems for the wings and tail surfaces and became the XB-25E and XB-25F, the first "experimental" models of the Mitchell. Neither of these models was developed further, but another B-25C which had been modified to the XB-25G had far reaching effects. Following successful experiments with a Douglas B-18A Bolo, it was found practicable to perform air-to-ground firing with a standard Army 75-mm field gun, and this was des-



Part of the awesome forward firepower of the B-25H. In addition to the 75-mm gun and four .50-cal. machine guns shown, there were four more .50-cal. machine guns mounted on the fuselage sides, and the top turret held two more.

(CAHA)

tined to be the primary armament of the B-25G.

The 75-mm M-4 cannon, which was 9 feet 6 inches long and weighed about 900 pounds, was mounted in a cradle extending beneath the pilot's seat. A hydro-spring mechanism formed part of the gun mounting to take up the 21 inch recoil each time the weapon was fired. Twenty-one 3-inch, 15 pound shells were carried and they were hand loaded by the navigator/cannoneer.

This unique armament had originally been conceived by Jack Fox, North American field representative and Col. Paul "Pappy" Gunn, skipper of the 3rd Attack Group, 5th Air Force. They proposed modifying the B-25 for strafing, since the Pacific theater offered few stationary targets for bombing.

The B-25G and its new armament was first tested operationally on July 28, 1943, by Col. "Pappy" Gunn against two Japanese destroyers in the Bismarck Sea. Three rounds were fired, with little effect. His group managed to sink the destroyers by skip bombing.

The twin .50-cal. nose machine guns were used to properly align the B-25 with a target before the big gun was fired. The cannon proved to be extremely accurate, but it was almost impossible to fire off more than about four shells in each attack, during which time the Mitchell was very vulnerable to ground fire as no evasive action could be taken. It has been said that the Mitchell almost seemed to stand still each time the 75-mm gun was fired, and that the cordite fumes all but suffocated the cannoneer.

As a result of recommendations by Col. Gunn, six additional .50-cal machine guns were added to the nose and each side of the armored nose. A later and less weighty version of the 75-mm cannon, Model T-13E1, was installed. The dorsal turret was moved to a new location just aft of the cockpit, and the lower turret deleted. Waist hatches provided mountings for a .50-cal gun and a revised tail, power-operated turret, mounted twin .50-cal guns. The B-25H could, therefore, carry the extraordinary armament of fourteen .50-cal. machine guns, a 75-mm cannon and up to 3,200 pounds of bombs. The crew consisted of a pilot, navigator/radio-operator/cannoneer, flight engineer/dorsal gunner, midship gunner/camera operator and tail gunner.

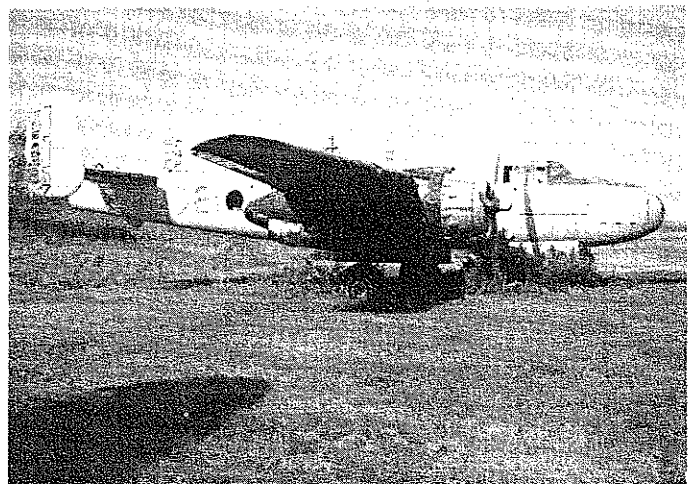
The first B-25H arrived in the Far East in February 1944, but the heavy cannon suffered from the same disadvantages as with the B-25G, and the concept was abandoned in the South-West Pacific by August 1944.

The most widely produced variant of the Mitchell was the B-25J where

over 4,300 were built at the Kansas City plant of North American between 1943 and 1945. Here the Mitchell returned to its primary mission of bombing, with the solid nose of the B-25H being replaced by the transparent fairing and bombardier's accommodations found in earlier versions of the Mitchell.

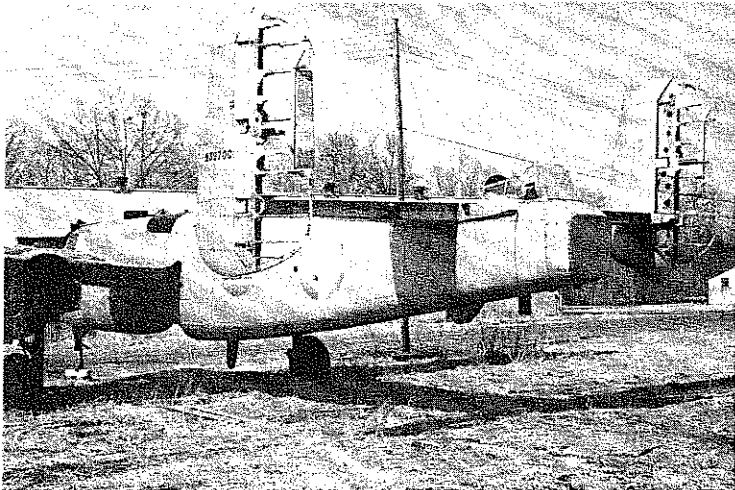
CAHA's B-25, Air Corps serial number 43-4999, was one of 1,000 "H" models produced (43-4105 to 5104) at the Inglewood, CA, plant of North American. Accepted by the Air Corps on June 14, 1944, it was flown to the North American plant at Kansas City for some minor modifications. (The Kansas City plant had just completed a production run of 2,290 B-25Ds and were then in full production of the new B-25J.)

Flown to Brooks Field, near San Antonio, TX, on July 7, 1944, 43-4999 was destined to spend its entire Air Corps career, albeit short-lived, being used for training on this field. By August 1944, all cannon-equipped B-25s had been pulled out of combat. With the end of World War II in August 1945, and no longer a need for large quantities of combat aircraft, our B-25 was declared surplus on September 7, 1945,



B-25H, N3970C/43-4999 sitting derelict at Mercer County Airport in New Jersey, in 1969, when CAHA acquired Mitchell. (CAHA)

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43-4999 in the summer of 1970, back at the Museum storage area, assembled and awaiting restoration. The Dominican Air Force markings are still evident. (CAHA)

and stricken from the Air Corps inventory on November 19.

The next destination for our B-25 is not known, but it probably ended up in an open field, joining the thousands of other combat aircraft no longer required, awaiting its turn to be chopped up for scrap. However, 43-4999 was saved from this ignominious fate.

In 1948, the Dominican Air Force underwent a major expansion program which included the formation of combat units -- Military Aviation Corps or *El Cuerpo de Aviacion Militar*." The Dominican government purchased various types of surplus combat aircraft from the British and the United States, including our B-25.

While the actual duties of our B-25 in the Dominican Air Force are not known, there is no doubt that the Mitchell did serve in the Central American country. On July 8, 1952, a Bill of Sale was signed by Brig. Gen. Rafael L. Trujillo, Chief of Staff, Dominican Air Force, selling 43-4999 to Charles E. Mathews & Cia, Inc., of Florida. It said in part:

"In consequence, the exportation of that aircraft and its departure by flight from the Dominican Republic to the United States of America is authorized."

Three days after the above sale, on July 11, 1952, the aircraft was sold again, this time to the Babb Company, Inc., of Newark, NJ.

On January 27, 1953, a CAA Registration Certificate was issued to the Babb Company and civil registration N3970C was assigned to 43-4999. Purportedly, the B-25 was sold again, this time in November 1958 to Les Bowman, Long Beach, CA. However, the sale never went through, for on November 21, 1961 the Babb Company applied to the FAA to cancel the registration. B-25H, N3970C/43-4999, was to sit idle at the Mercer County Aircraft, Trenton, NJ, for almost ten years.

CAHA officials first became aware of the B-25 in the summer of 1966 but it wasn't until January 1967, when on a trip near the area, that they had an opportunity to actually see the aircraft. Actually, there were two B-25s at the airport, our B-25H and a B-25J. As soon as the CAHA officials saw the aircraft, a decision was made to attempt to acquire one for the new CAHA museum. An aircraft move of this magnitude had never before even been contemplated by the new organization.

On January 23, 1967, President Harvey H. Lippincott officially requested the acquisition of the aircraft from the Airport Manager, John Stephan.

About this time, CAHA was undergoing some internal turmoil and nothing further was done about the B-25s until October 16, 1969, when Phil O'Keefe once again contacted John Stephan about the aircraft. Four days later, he had his response.

"Please be advised that the two

B-25 aircraft are in no way air-worthy and cannot be ferried to Connecticut...We must put a minimum of 60 days for removal of aircraft otherwise we will have to dispose of them...It is sincerely hoped that you will find it possible to save these aircraft for historical reasons, rather than have them go to the junk pile."

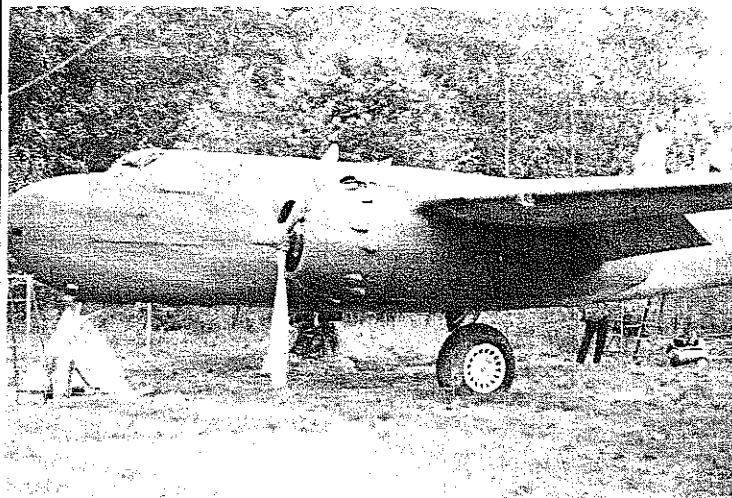
By the beginning of November, the conditions were accepted and a detailed plan to move the aircraft back to Bradley Field was inaugurated. A decision was made to acquire only the B-25H, because of its rarity and uniqueness -- a decision well founded in hindsight, as our B-25H is the only one of its type in existence today.

Investigation of the B-25 revealed that the aircraft was complete except for instrumentation and some minor items. The original retrieval plan called for three weekends to dismantle the airplane and move it back to Connecticut. The first trip was to be on November 14, 1969 and to be completed before Christmas.

A cadre of eight CAHA members left for New Jersey on that first weekend. After starting the disassembly and working until dark, the group found a place to sleep in the airport fire house.

"Sleep was difficult that first night as the police radio from Trenton blared continually of auto accidents, crashes, robberies, fights, stabbings, fires and assorted problems of humanity in what seemed was a sleepless city."

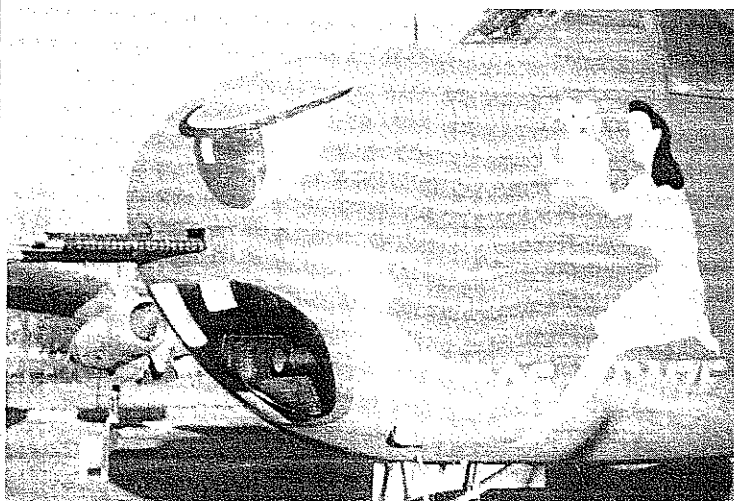
Undaunted, the group continued their efforts the next morning and left for Connecticut Sunday evening. Disassembly was more difficult than originally anticipated, and the original plan of completing the move in



Summer 1972. The first coat of paint is applied to the restored B-25 in the restoration area of the Museum. (CAHA)

three weekends had grown to five weekends. Four were actually completed before the end of 1969, but the advent of bad weather forced postponement of further activity until March of 1970. Three trips were to be made in 1970, March, May and July. But the aircraft was moved.

Twenty-six different CAHA members and friends helped during the seven trips. Six took part in three or more; Bob Cooper, Jim Bennitt and David Armstrong were on three trips. Bill O'Dwyer and Bob Thompson were



Markings were completed in the summer, 1975. (CAHA)

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on four, and Harvey H. Lippincott made six trips.

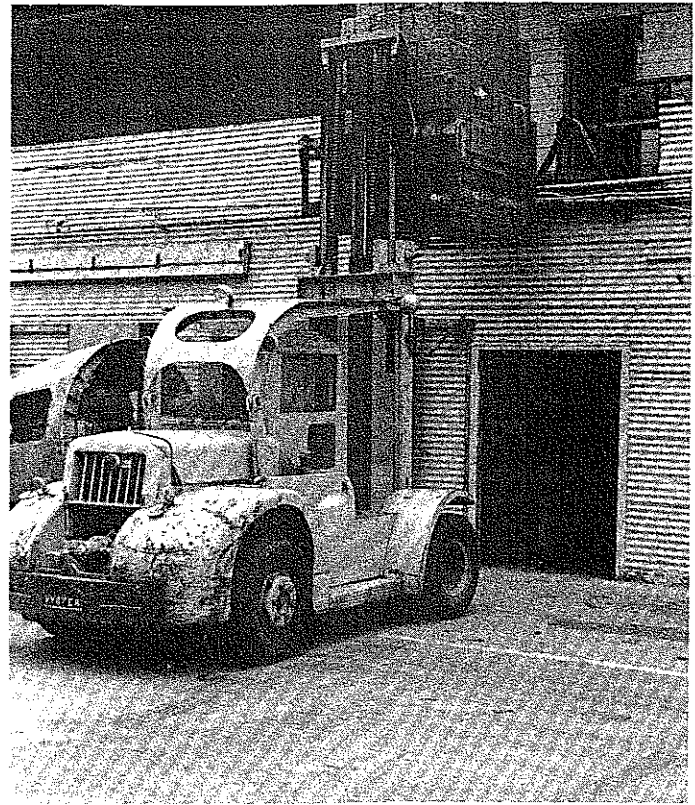
After the aircraft had been moved back to Bradley Field, it was reassembled and restoration activities started. Mario Tamiso assumed the responsibility for restoration. By the summer of 1972, restoration had progressed to the point where the airplane could be painted.

Although when our B-25 rolled off the assembly line and was accepted by the Air Corps it was unpainted, the Museum Staff felt that a protective paint job was necessary to preserve the airplane in an outdoor environment. The markings of the 12th Bomb Group, 82nd Bomb Squadron, 10th Air Force, in Pandaveswar, India, in 1944-45 was chosen. As with most B-25Hs in the Pacific at that time, the aircraft was painted olive drab upper surfaces and a neutral grey undersurface.

After the b-25 had been completed Mario went on to other projects, principally the B-29, but the Mitchell remained one of the centers of attraction to Museum visitors until that fateful day in October 1979, when the tornado wrecked havoc to the aircraft in the outdoor exhibit, including the B-25H.

A continuation of this article will appear in the next Newsletter, indicating the efforts to repair the tornado damage.

LIBRARY MOVE COMPLETED



In the photo above, Chuck Horner captured the last load of Library materials leaving the previous Library location on the second floor of the hangar. Since the hangar was no longer suitable for our operations and in fact, is scheduled to come down, a new location had to be found to temporarily house this valuable collection.

The needed temporary site was found in an old school building in Windsor Locks. The school had been closed for some time but is still entirely suitable for our requirements.

Jack Ramsay, Librarian (see article on Page 20), was responsible for the careful packing of the Library materials for this move and storage at the new site.

Although the Library will remain in storage for some time to come, additional material will be sought. Any donations would be welcome.

