

**AFTER THE CURTISS O2C/F8C
SERIES, CURTISS CONTINUED
THE NAME HELLDIVR WITH
THE COMPLETELY
DIFFERENT SBC SERIES
OF DIVE-BOMBERS**

Magnificent shot by "the master" showing SBC-4 BuNo 1318 of the Seattle Naval Air Reserve set up for landing at NAR Oakland during July 1940. (W.T. Larkins)

HELLDIVER!

**PART FOUR
BY RICHARD
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PHOTOGRAPHY FROM THE WILLIAM T. LARKINS COLLECTION AND THE ALPHA ARCHIVE

With the next variant of the Helldiver, the XSBC-4 (Model 77B), Curtiss got back to Wright engines — the essential difference between the SBC-3 and the XSBC-4 being the use of a 900-hp Wright R-1820-22. Since this was a single-row radial, the diameter of the nose cowling was necessarily larger. To avoid restricting the pilot's forward visibility, the engine was mounted slightly lower in the nose to maintain the same top cowling line as on the SBC-3. This lowered the bottom of the cowling considerably and gave the SBC-4 a very ponderous nose compared to the upswept cowl of the SBC-3. This aircraft was the eighth-from-last SBC-3 (BuNo 0582) that was retained by Curtiss to test the engine change. The second XSBC-4 was created by the diversion of the first production SBC-4 (BuNo 1268) to use for test work.

XSBC-4 was put into utility service under its experimental designation, even though it was a production aircraft, after the test program was completed. Some of the SBC-4s were delivered to VS-2 on the *Lexington* but the majority were delivered directly from the factory to Naval Reserve units throughout the country, a rare case where the Reserve got factory-new equipment instead of obsolete hand-me-downs from the line squadrons.

The first XSBC-4 passed its flight testing with good grades and on 5 January 1938, a contract was signed between Curtiss and the Bureau of Aeronautics for 124 SBC-4s and deliveries began in March 1939 and concluded in April 1940. Navy serials were 1268/1325, 1474/1594, and 1809/1853. These were the last combat biplanes ordered by the American armed services. An additional 50, serials 4199/4248, came along later, but these were not on a new order. They were the result of some international politics and swapping for planes that had left the country, and did not add to the Navy's total of SBC-4s which were already obsolete.

In keeping with Navy policy of the time, the second

The Naval Reserve units getting new SBC-4s were recorded in June 1940 as:

- NRAB Anacostia, District of Columbia: three SBC-4s for VS-6R and VMS-3R
- NRAB Boston, Massachusetts: Three SBC-4s assigned to VS-1R, VS-2R, VMS-1R
- NRAB Detroit, Michigan: Three SBC-4s assigned to VS-8R, VMS-5R
- NRAB Glenview, Illinois: Four SBC-4s assigned to VS-9R
- NRAB Kansas City, Kansas: Four SBC-4s assigned to VS-12R, VMS-10R
- NRAB Long Beach, California: Four SBC-4s assigned to VS-13R, VS-14R, VMS-7R

