



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

HELLDIVER!

**PART THREE
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PHOTOGRAPHY FROM THE WILLIAM T. LARKINS COLLECTION AND THE ALPHA ARCHIVE

Although there is no name distinction between them, there were two famous lines of Curtiss Helldiver airplanes in the US Navy. The first was the F8C/O2C biplane of 1928-1931, the first designed-for-the-purpose dive-bomber. It had a relatively short life as a first-line service type but was the mainstay of the Reserve squadrons for a longer period. Delivered too late for the Marine Corps action in Nicaragua, its principal claim to fame is its starring role in the 1932 Clark Gable-Wallace Beery movie *Helldivers* (Please see *Air Classics March and April 2017*). The other Helldiver, of course, is the SB2C monoplane of World War II.

In between these two, however, was another Helldiver that is truly one of US Naval Aviation's forgotten airplanes. Although officially called Helldiver by Curtiss, in keeping with its policy of naming most of its Buffalo-built airplanes after birds, the name didn't click with either the public or the Navy, which preferred to use the service designation SBC (Scout Bomber Curtiss).

Like its famous predecessor, the SBC Helldiver began its life as a fighter, the one-only Curtiss XF12C-1 (Experimental Fighter, 12th Type, Curtiss). The Navy was quite interested in two-seat fighters in the early 1930s, and the

After the Navy lost interest in the two-seat fighter concept, the XF12C went through a series of modifications and redesignations that resulted in the XSCB-1, which is pictured on 17 February 1943.

The XSCB-1 was destroyed on 14 June 1934 when a propeller blade detached during a high-speed dive. The pilot survived with a broken leg and arm.



Oddly, the SBC series traces its heritage back to the XF12C, which was a parasol two-seat fighter developed during 1932/33. The aircraft is seen here in its original configuration and the SBC stood for Scout-Bomber (a category established in 1934). There was still considerable evolution work to go through before the aircraft became the next Helldiver.

