

## WARR



**ABOVE: The Warbird Warriors Foundation's beautiful PV-2 Harpoon Attu Warrior flying near Houston, Texas.**

**T**he Lockheed PV-2 Harpoon can hardly be called a prominent participant in the Second World War, but it did not lack importance. Its work as a reconnaissance and patrol aircraft was vital to the USA, being conducted principally in the Pacific theatre and the difficult territory of the Aleutian Islands.

At least three are still flying, in the hands of private individuals and not-for-profit organisations. In the course of

the last Wings over Houston show the author was able to perform an exclusive air-to-air session with *Attu Warrior*, the Harpoon looked after by Dave Hansen and the Warbird Warriors Foundation. Before departing on our photo mission, which also included a few minutes of formation flying with the 'Aleutian Tiger' P-40K of the Texas Flying Legends Museum, we met up with Dave, who explained how this heavy aircraft was returned to the air.

"The chance encounter with the Harpoon took place in Wyoming, when I spotted it on the apron at Buffalo Airport", he recalls. "After seeing that it was in a state of disuse, I found out that it was for sale. In July 2006 I managed to come to an agreement with the owner. Subsequently, as I had decided to move it by air to my facility at Utah for restoration, we had to work for more than a year to get it into a condition to perform the ferry flight



# TRIBUTE FROM THE FROZEN NORTH

*In the Second World War, Lockheed PV-2 Harpoons struck at the northern parts of Japan's empire. This example today pays tribute*

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY: LUIGINO CALIARO



safely, as the aircraft had not flown for almost 20 years.

“Finally, on 7 October 2007 the PV-2 took to the sky, and although it was suffering from a few minor faults we managed to bring it to Heber City. There, together with a group of friends and volunteers, I began the restoration work. I had decided to return it to the exact condition, internally and externally, of an aircraft that flew during the war in the remote Alaskan theatre. It





**BELOW:** The PV-2's interior has been restored to a high standard, as shown by the navigator's station.

**BELOW RIGHT:** Dave Hansen (left), founder of the Warbird Warriors Foundation, and Harpoon pilot Steve Guenard.

wasn't an easy task, as we had to track down many parts that were completely missing, mainly due to the fact that in its latter years the aircraft had been used to spray insecticide. In particular, much work was required to restore and install the dorsal turret and re-fit the interior.

"On 23 May 2009, after two years and thousands of hours of work, my team achieved its goal of returning this beautiful aircraft to the air. I have to admit that on that day I was

particularly proud of the excellent work we had all done. The decision to paint it in the classic three-tone scheme of a US Navy aircraft from VPB-139, which used the Harpoon in Alaska, was a worthy tribute to those men who, during the war, flew this twin in a particularly difficult and hostile environment, performing work that was obscure and never sufficiently appreciated. Thanks to the talent of Dave Mueller, a local artist, it was decided to apply the *Attu Warrior* nose art, with which I am trying to represent all the aircraft that flew from that remote and forgotten airfield in the Aleutian Islands.

"Unfortunately the negative aspects of this aircraft are the enormous operating and maintenance costs, which are never adequately covered by sponsorship and airshow appearance fees. To give you an idea, to return the aircraft to its original design state involved an expenditure of more than

\$200,000, of which \$25,000 alone went on the Plexiglas turret. However, I am very proud to display this important aircraft, and, thanks to the group of enthusiasts who support me, we manage to keep it constantly in a serviceable condition."

Today *Attu Warrior* is based at Heber City, Utah, the home of the Warbird Warriors Foundation, which is Dave Hansen's primary activity. Dave has long been associated with warbirds, and has worked with them since 1990. Having been with several aviation companies, he set up his own business in the sector, taking on numerous restoration projects such as a Yak-3U, Nanchang CJ-6, Cessna L-19 Bird Dog and Vans RV-8 besides, obviously, his Harpoon.

Steve Guenard is one of the six pilots authorised to fly the Harpoon during air displays. He has a particularly interesting background — his father was a pilot and instructor with the US Navy, flying the SB2C Helldiver, while





# ATTU WARRIOR'S BACKGROUND

Constructed at the Lockheed Vega facility in Burbank, California and assigned constructor's number 15-1438, Dave Hansen's Harpoon was completed on 4 April 1945 and, with BuNo 37472, was delivered to the US Navy depot at NAAS (Naval Auxiliary Air Station) Holtville on 19 November 1945. The end of the war resulted in the aircraft never being assigned to any operational unit, and it remained in storage until January 1947, when it was re-allocated to another depot at NAS Litchfield Park, Arizona. There, nevertheless, it was maintained in flying condition, performing local missions before being transferred on 8 May 1953 to NAS Alameda on San Francisco Bay, where for three months it was used for training and liaison duties. It returned to the Litchfield Park store in February 1954.

Having spent almost another year in storage, in December 1954 BuNo 37472 was assigned to the Naval Reserve Training Facility at NAS Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, being flown as a training aircraft for anti-submarine operations. January 1956 saw the Harpoon moving on to NAS Anacostia, Washington DC, a few months' employment there – presumably on liaison tasks – seeing it through until 19 August 1956, when it made its final trip to the depot at Litchfield Park. BuNo 37472 was officially withdrawn from service on 17 December that year, having recorded 387 operational flying hours.

Upon being declared surplus, in 1957 the PV-2 was sold onto the civil market, initially registered as N5223V. Six years later it adopted its present registration, N7670C, when it was acquired by George Stell of Phoenix, who converted it into a crop-sprayer. Over the following years the Harpoon changed owners numerous times, always being used as a sprayer until 1987 when Hirth Air Tankers in Buffalo, Wyoming, purchased it with the intention of converting it into a water-bomber. Unfortunately, following the death of the company's owner, this did not take place. For several years the aircraft was parked on an apron and never flew.

Finally, in 2006, the Harpoon was acquired by Dave Hansen, who returned it to flying condition after a thorough overhaul. Its colour scheme depicts that of an aircraft operated by VPB-139, a US Navy unit operating in Alaska during the Second World War.



Steve himself is a former US Air Force pilot, with thousands of hours on the F-106 Delta Dart and F-4 Phantom II fighters, before working in the civil sector with Delta Air Lines. In terms of his activity with Dave's group, Steve says, "Thanks to Dave I've realised my dream of flying a warbird. During 2014 I displayed *Attu Warrior* at three of the 18 airshows in which it participated, and wherever our twin was present it has been particularly appreciated.

"Flying this aircraft is a real pleasure, as it has excellent handling and incredible power, which allows it to fly almost like a fighter. It is extremely honest and can always be flown with a good margin of safety; also, we fly it very gently when compared to its operation in wartime.

"If I was asked to identify any weaknesses, I could point to an

inevitable stiffness in the controls, which must be tackled with some muscular inputs, and the fuel consumption, which is around 150 gallons per hour in flight. Obviously, if you begin to

manoeuvre the consumption increases exponentially — when displaying at low altitude and working the throttles, hourly fuel consumption can rise as high as 200 gallons."

## VPB-139 AND THE 'EMPIRE EXPRESS'

Equipped with the PV-1 Ventura, the predecessor of the Harpoon, the unit was constituted as VB-139 at NAS Whidbey Island, Washington State, on 1 April 1943 under the command of

Lt Cdr W. R. Stevens. Preparations for a move to the assigned operational area began on 1 October, and a few days later the squadron's Venturas began transferring to Amchitka in the Aleutian

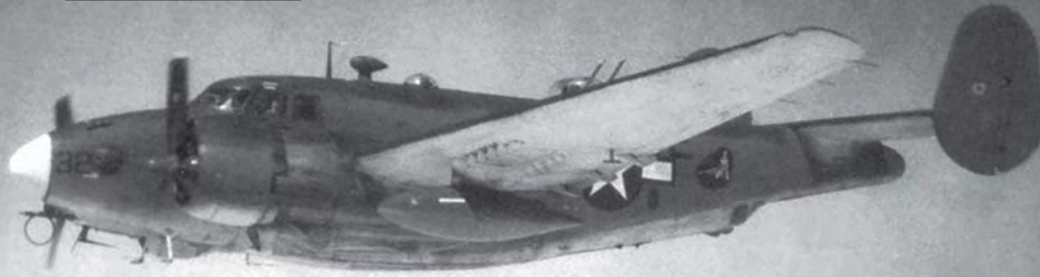
islands of Alaska. There they began to perform patrol duties, the first mission being flown on 8 October. Sorties were usually uneventful, but the weather was a serious hazard, at times delaying

**BELOW:** This view of a VPB-139 Harpoon at its Attu base shows well the underwing rocket armament.

VIA SUSAN SIM







**LEFT: A PV-2 of VPB-139 on patrol. The aircraft gave the US Navy good service, despite a slow start due to a wing re-design.**

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surrounding buildings. There was no opposition from either ground or air, indicating either complete surprise or Japanese indifference to an attack on what appears to have been an abandoned area.

That month saw VPB-139's Harpoons flying several rocket attacks and patrol sorties. Some damage from anti-aircraft artillery was reported, as on 28 April, when four Harpoons had as their objective the Minami-zaki radar installation. Several rockets hit the target area, but two aircraft took 'triple-A' fire, minor damage being caused.

Signs of wing spar problems soon restricted the operational use of the PV-2s to patrols, reconnaissance missions in weather conditions that permitted a ready escape from enemy fighters, and rocket attacks on shipping. Even so, the Harpoons of VPB-139 soldiered on, and, with spring bringing an improvement in the weather, sortie rates increased too.

Fighter opposition was encountered, but generally the Japanese pilots were not very aggressive. On 22 April occurred the only operational loss, when Harpoon BuNo 37075 failed to return from a patrol. Extended air and sea searches were performed, but to no avail.



VPB-139 flew several reconnaissance and anti-shiping missions during May and June. Two Harpoons engaged in an anti-shiping sweep of the east coast of Paramushiro on 10 June discovered an enemy freighter under attack. Nine strafing and bombing runs were made, and two bombs hit the ship. More than 3,000 rounds of ammunition were expended by the Harpoons — during a bombing run, a drop tank fell off one of the aircraft and struck the forward part of the ship, scoring another hit. The vessel caught fire, and when the PV-2s left the area it was burning fiercely.

A notable engagement occurred on 22 June. Four Harpoons patrolling off the

### VB-139/VPB-139 home base assignments

- NAS Whidbey Island, Washington: 1 April 1943-7 October 1943
- NAF Amchitka, Alaska: 7 October 1943-10 December 1943
- NAS Attu, Alaska: 10 December 1943-30 June 1944
- NAS Whidbey Island, Washington: 30 June 1944-26 February 1945
- NAS Attu, Alaska: 26 February 1945-23 August 1945
- NAS Seattle, Washington: 23 August 1945-13 September 1945



**ABOVE: A souvenir of life on VPB-139 during the final year of the war, as presented to crew members.**

VIA SUSAN SIM

operations and often seriously impairing the completion of missions.

From 1 November, a detachment was established at NAS Attu, another airfield in the Aleutian archipelago. After a month of operations, on 10 December Attu became the unit's principal operating base. A tough environment it may have been, but the Venturas undertook a notable level of flying activity, conducting attacks against and photographic reconnaissance of Japanese targets in the area of the Kurili islands

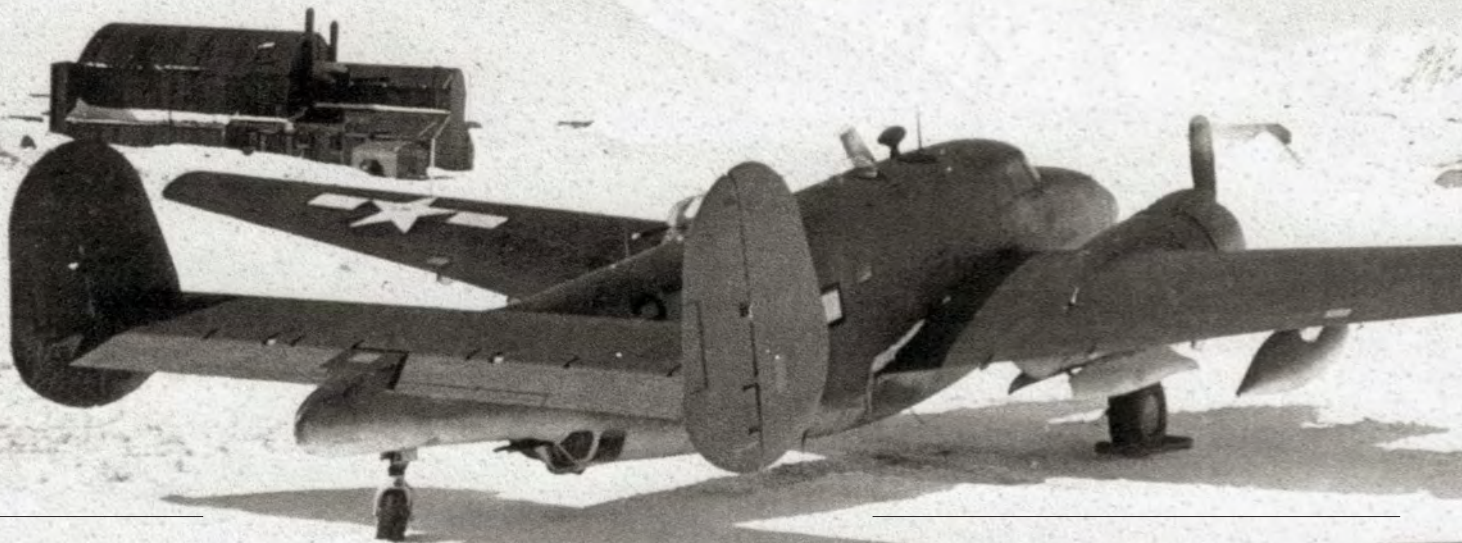
as well as patrol missions. The unit also performed night reconnaissance and demonstrated the feasibility of the PV-1 as a long-range medium bomber able to strike the northern Japanese homeland.

Having survived six months in the frozen north, VB-139 was relieved on 5 May 1944 and returned to the US to await further assignments. The unit was re-commissioned on 1 August 1944, under the command of Lt Cdr Glenn David, and training re-started at NAS Whidbey Island.

In early February 1945 there started to arrive 15 new PV-2 Harpoons, familiarisation and training flights duly commenced, albeit limited by technical problems. A six-aircraft section departed for Attu on 1 March 1945, followed two days later by the other nine Harpoons. In the meantime, the squadron was re-designated as VPB-139. A total of 55 officers and 54 enlisted men were on strength. It officially relieved VPB-136 of its duties in the Aleutians on 12 March 1945, and began flying patrol sectors.

The men of VPB-139 were part of the 'Empire Express', the nickname given to Fleet Air Wing 4's Ventura and Harpoon units. Due to the severe weather in the Aleutians, each aircraft always carried two co-pilots/navigators. It was best to have on board two men adept at navigation and piloting in case of any injuries being suffered.

On 6 April 1945, four aircraft carried out their first attack mission. Using rockets, they were sent to strike an enemy installation at Minami-zaki and an alternate target at Kokutan-zaki. Hits were noted on a lighthouse and





# HARPOON HERO

Lt Gaetano Carmine Anzalone, more often known as Tom, was a VPB-139 pilot who took part in what turned out to be an especially hazardous sortie. He enlisted in the US Naval Reserves aged 18 on 15 September 1942, and his active service began on 11 January 1943. Following pilot training, he was commissioned and, by now 19 years old, received his wings on 11 April 1944.

Tom was assigned to fly PBY Catalinas and PV-1 Venturas, and in August 1944 was posted to VB-139, then based at NAS Whidbey Island, Washington. As related elsewhere, the unit – soon re-designated VPB-139 – received the new PV-2 Harpoon and deployed to NAS Attu, where Anzalone arrived on 7 March.

A mission on 10 May 1945 involved a group of eight aircraft attacking radar installations at Minami-zaki, in the course of which five were hit by anti-aircraft fire. Anzalone was acting as navigator in a Harpoon also crewed by pilot Carl Heikkenen, co-pilot Bob Andrews, mechanic Jack Miller, radio operator Charles Rowles and top turret gunner James (Jim) Sarvis. Shrapnel punctured the fuselage, entering the cabin through the starboard side of the cockpit and the windshield. It went over the co-pilot's head and straight into the navigator, Tom, who was standing up while trying to spot enemy aircraft.

The aircraft was almost inverted at the time, and Tom was hit in the left leg, shoulder and hand. He was bleeding severely, and Jim Sarvis took charge of lying Tom down in the back of the aircraft and administering morphine to lessen his pain.

One shell went through the wing, rendering the flaps inoperable. Nonetheless, the Harpoon returned to Attu, where Tom received treatment from a medical officer. According to his logbooks, he was out on another mission four days later. In a ceremony on 25 July 1945, Anzalone was awarded the Purple Heart for his bravery in service.

He later received two Air Medals, on 19 and 25 October 1945: the first a medal and ribbon, the second a Gold Star in lieu of a further Air Medal. In addition, he was awarded the World War II Victory Medal, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal and the American Campaign Medal.

Promotion to Lieutenant, Junior Grade took place on 1 November 1945, but little more than a month passed before, on 14 December, Tom left the active-duty US Navy as it reduced its manpower following the end of the war. However, from 1 July 1946, he resumed his service as part of the active Naval



**ABOVE:** Standing (left to right), 'Tom' Anzalone, Carl Heikkenen and Robert Andrews; sitting (left to right), Jack Miller, Charles Rowles and Jim Sarvis. Together, this crew survived the mission of 10 May 1945. VIA SUSAN SIM



**RIGHT:** Lt 'Tom' Anzalone in the cockpit of a VPB-139 PV-2. VIA SUSAN SIM

Reserves. Temporarily assigned to VP-913, flying PV-2s and PBYs out of Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn, New York, he went on to medium landplane patrol squadron VP-ML-74 in 1947. From 17 August the following year, Tom was assigned to NAS Moffett Field, California for additional training. He was often given the task of carrying out ferry flights. On 13 July 1950, Tom was promoted to Lieutenant, and in December 1952 re-assigned to NAS Brunswick, Maine. He remained with the Navy until his retirement on 16 September 1953.

east coast of Shumshu were attacked head-on by three Japanese Oscars. Straight after sighting the enemy fighters, they started to manoeuvre, but the hostile aircraft opened fire. Having executed an evasive turn to port, the Harpoon flown by Lt Marlin was attacked by an Oscar. The fighter made a level pass from the eight o'clock position, veering to port as it came in.

The gunner on Marlin's Harpoon opened fire from his turret, and by the

time the Oscar had reached his 11 o'clock, in a tight turn to port, it was seen to be smoking. Suddenly it pulled up into a stall, recovered and executed a level run from nine o'clock. Smoke and flames were noted around the cowlings, particularly on the port side. The fighter passed beneath its target.

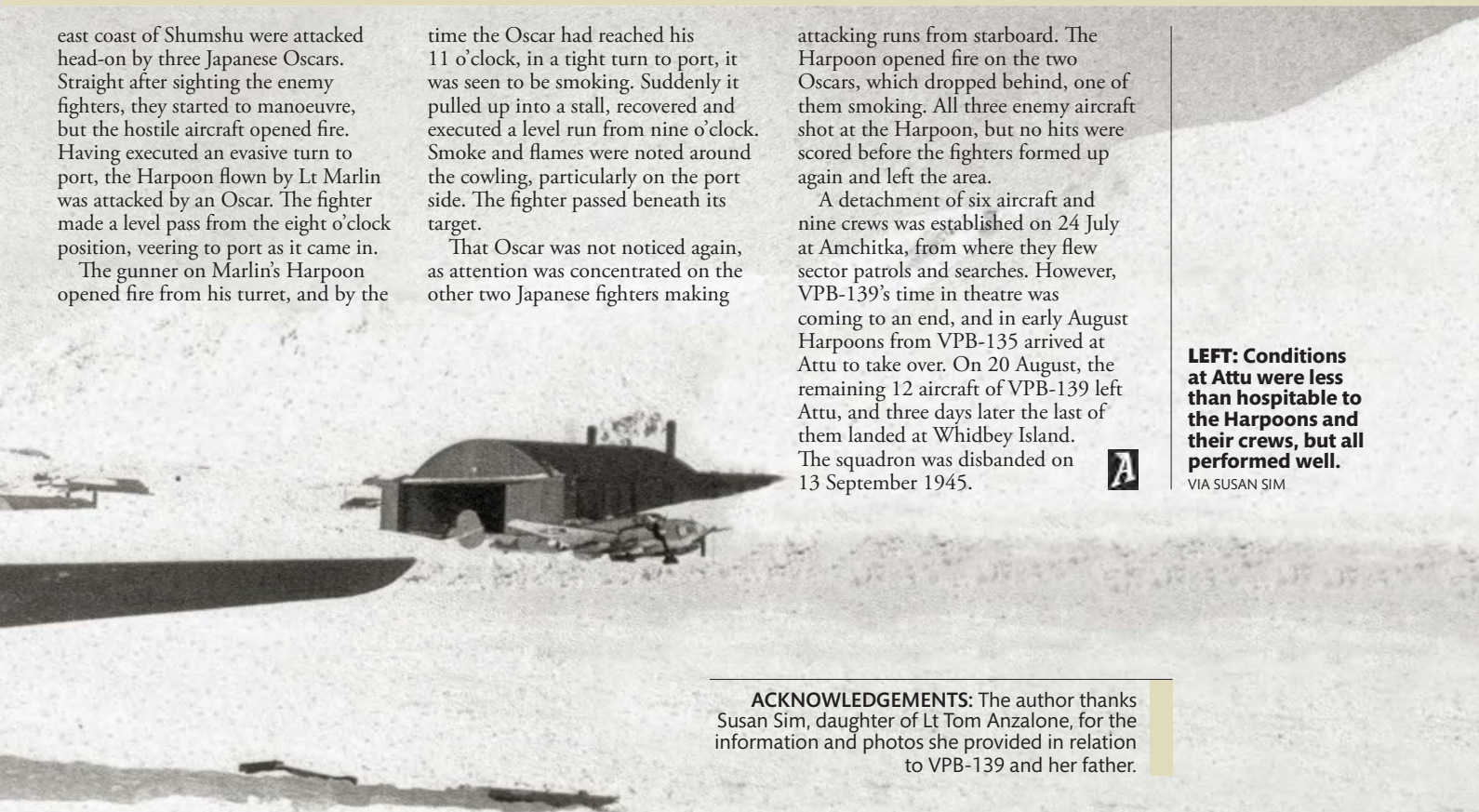
That Oscar was not noticed again, as attention was concentrated on the other two Japanese fighters making

attacking runs from starboard. The Harpoon opened fire on the two Oscars, which dropped behind, one of them smoking. All three enemy aircraft shot at the Harpoon, but no hits were scored before the fighters formed up again and left the area.

A detachment of six aircraft and nine crews was established on 24 July at Amchitka, from where they flew sector patrols and searches. However, VPB-139's time in theatre was coming to an end, and in early August Harpoons from VPB-135 arrived at Attu to take over. On 20 August, the remaining 12 aircraft of VPB-139 left Attu, and three days later the last of them landed at Whidbey Island. The squadron was disbanded on 13 September 1945.

**LEFT:** Conditions at Attu were less than hospitable to the Harpoons and their crews, but all performed well.

VIA SUSAN SIM



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AEROPLANE



Lockheed PV-2 Harpoon BuNo 37472/N7670C and  
Curtiss P-40K Warhawk 42-10256/N401WH  
Warbird Warriors Foundation and Texas Flying Legends Museum

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