

# SAVE THE DEVASTATORS!

PAUL G. ALLEN'S DISCOVERY OF THE WRECK OF THE USS LEXINGTON AND ITS AIRCRAFT HAS LED TO AN AMBITIOUS PLAN TO RECOVER THE DOUGLAS DEVASTATORS AND A GRUMMAN WILDCAT

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UNDERWATER AIRCRAFT PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY PAUL G. ALLEN



Flight jacket insignia for VT-2.

During October 2022, in accordance with the regulatory guidelines (32 CFR 767) under the "Sunken Military Craft Act of 2004" (10 U.S.C. §113), a proposal was submitted to the Underwater Archeological Branch of the Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHC) for the recovery and presentation to the American public of Douglas TBD-1 Devastator torpedo-bombers and a highly significant Grumman F4F-3 Wildcat fighter. The team that submitted the proposal consists of staff from Naval Aviation Museum Foundation, the Kalamazoo Aviation History Museum (Air Zoo), A and T Recovery, and other experts with the combined experience and expertise in conducting and completing such efforts. It is hoped that the NHHC will approve and support the proposal. From their mission, it would seem that they would be more than willing to be a part of

this historic and daring effort to recover and preserve aircraft that were very important to the US Navy during the early, dark days of WWII.

The mission of the NHHC is, "to collect, preserve, protect, and make available the artifacts, documents, and art that best embodies our naval history and heritage for present and future generations; advance the knowledge of naval history and heritage through professional research, analysis, interpretation, products and services; make naval history 'come alive' for our Sailors and Marines to enhance readiness and *esprit de corps*; and remind America of its need to maintain a strong Navy and Marine Corps to protect its citizens, their freedoms and the nation's maritime commerce."

The project team has set its sights on the USS *Lexington* (CV-2). The carrier was lost during the Battle of the Coral Sea, where she sank to the sea floor (9800-foot deep) with over a dozen TBD-1 Devastators parked on her deck.

In late 2017, team members were searching through the Navy's records on the Battle of the Coral Sea at the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland, and came across the Destroyer Squadron reports of the sinking of the *Lexington*. In those reports was the location of the point at which the carrier sank. The team immediately scanned the documents and emailed them to the leadership



Pre-war photograph of VT-2 TBDs displaying the immaculate and colorful schemes worn by these aircraft before the threat of war changed the colors to camouflage.



The wreckage of two VT-2 Devastators. TBD-1 2-T-9 seems to have been relatively intact until the inverted 2-T-4 dropped upon it. The amazing photo shows the Devastators are eminently restorable or could be left in an "as-found" museum exhibit.