

Building the **FLYING FORTRESS**

OUR SERIES CONTINUES AS BOEING, LOCKHEED VEGA, AND DOUGLAS RAMP UP B-17F PRODUCTION— PART SIX

BY MICHAEL O'LEARY

Seattle weather can often be cold and wet but the flight testing of the B-17Fs had to go on regardless. In this view, one worker is tossing up a tool to another atop the wing so he can open the fuel filler cap prior to partially filling the tanks prior to a flight test. The photo gives a good view of the Wright R-1820-97 Cyclone radials fitted to the wing. One of the main reasons that the Cyclone was picked for the Fortress was because the engine had an excellent horsepower growth potential, thus helping cancel out the ever increasing weight of each B-17 variant. Demand for the radial was such that it was built under license by Lycoming, Pratt & Whitney Canada, and Studebaker. The first R-1820s appeared in 1931 and the powerplant remained in production well into the 1950s. The R-1820 was created from the earlier R-1750 and the first R-1820 was also known as the Cyclone F and it featured a forged aluminum crankcase and developed 890-hp via a General Electric supercharger. For the Cyclone G of 1937, Wright introduced its own single-speed supercharger and the G series was developed to produce 1200-hp at 2500-rpm. The G series made up the bulk of the R-1820 production during WWII and was installed in the Flying Fortress. A stunning total of 64,093 R-1820-97 engines was built between July 1942 and October 1943 — more than any other variant in the R-1820 series. The government built a 1,560,000-square-foot plant in South Bend, Indiana, on 318 acres for Studebaker to build R-1820s.



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