

HALL BOATS FOR THE COASTIES

THIS OBSCURE DESIGN PERFORMED EFFECTIVE ANTI-U-BOAT PATROLS WITH THE US COAST GUARD

BY HOWARD CARTER

The howl from the tips of the Curtiss Electric CS32D constant speed propellers increased along with the speed of the big blue flying boat as it plowed straight down the harbor, rising slightly as it started to get onto its step. The crews of several tugboats watched as the biplane lifted into the murky New York air and began to climb with a slow left turn — the dull silver cylindrical shapes of the depth charges it was carrying clearly visible under the bottom wing. Once firmly airborne, the plane's captain slightly brought back the twin throttles

for the 750-hp Wright Cyclone radials as he climbed the heavily-laden biplane to its cruising altitude of just under 3000 feet before setting up for a long patrol up and down America's eastern seaboard in search of the deadly U-Boats that had been causing havoc amongst the merchant ships

heading to Britain with vital war supplies. It was February 1942, and the U-Boats were devastating the Merchant Marine fleet that was trying to get Lend-Lease supplies safely across the Atlantic. Even before Pearl Harbor, the U-Boats were sinking the transports directly outside American ports and the rising plumes of black smoke were easily seen in major cities. Along with the US Navy, a good portion of meeting and defeating the U-Boat threat had

fallen to the United States Coast Guard.

The last action that the USCG had seen was during Prohibition and the Coast Guard did a very creditable job in intercepting "rum runners" both on the sea and in the air. Some of these confrontations turned quite violent and the USCG picked up some surprising combat experience. The "Coasties" (as USCG members were fondly called) were also able to acquire an eclectic collection of confiscated aircraft that were painted in USCG colors and utilized for a variety of tasks. However, operating and maintaining these aircraft, some which were one-of-a-kind, was difficult and it was obvious that the USCG — given their excellent record during Prohibition — could perform even more efficiently if given newer machines. With the increasing tension in Europe and the Far East, the government was easing up on its budget purse strings and the USCG could go shopping.

Given the nature of their mission, it was obvious that the Coasties had very specific requirements. They needed rugged machines that could operate in difficult weather conditions and be

Aviation photographer Rudy Arnold extensively covered Floyd Bennett Field before and during WWII. This allowed him to record US Coast Guard aviation activities including the operation of PH-2 and PH-3 flying boats. Set up on the ground to make it look like the crew of this Hall PH-3 is engaging a U-Boat with its .50-caliber gun, this view shows the enclosed cockpit cabin of the -3 to advantage.



The Floyd Bennett Field US Coast Guard facility including a Hall PH-2, two Grumman Goose amphibians, and the officers in dress white uniforms during early 1940.