

# THE SMASHER

PAUL MANTZ, THE DEVELOPMENT OF AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY IN HOLLYWOOD,  
AND A FLEET OF THREE SURPLUS B-25 MITCHELLS - PART THREE  
BY SCOTT THOMPSON

Mitchell N1203 would not fly again until mid-January 1956 when a project took *The Smasher* to Reno with Stan Reaver as pilot-in-command. Several days of work again in the Owens Valley and the area between Reno and Los Angeles were most likely to support the filming of *Around the World in 80 Days* for the Michael Todd Company. Afterwards, Reaver brought N1203 to Mantz's new — and final — base at Orange County Airport near Santa Ana. At the time, this was a very remote airfield mainly surrounded by agriculture.

On 22 February 1956, Jim

Thompson took N1203 to Edwards AFB for filming of the Warner Brothers film *Toward the Unknown*. Though Mantz was the aerial coordinator for the film, Thompson flew all the air-to-air sequences. Between 23 February and 10 March, eight flights and more than 13 hours of flight time were logged for the filming. Then, on 24 March, Thompson flew N1203 to Eglin AFB, Florida, for second unit filming of *Toward the Unknown*, flying an additional 14 hours for filming between 27 March and 6 April 1956. The completed film contains some great footage of period USAF fighters and bombers, including B-47s, F-94s, F-100s, F-102s, the Bell X-2, and one

of the only two Martin XB-51s built. Sadly, that XB-51 was lost in a crash on 25 March 1956 while *en route* from Edwards to Eglin for the filming.

In August 1956, the legal ownership of N1203 was transferred from Paul Mantz as an individual to Paul Mantz Air Services after the latter was incorporated in California.

In October 1956, *The Smasher* and Mantz were back at Eglin AFB filming sequences for another Lowell Thomas *Cinerama* production, *Search for Paradise*. Though basically a drama inserted into another travelogue, Mantz did some original air-to-air filming of USAF F-100 Super Sabres for sequences used to close the film. Other *Cinerama* film sequences shot earlier for *This Is Cinerama* and



B-25H *The Smasher* on the Paul Mantz Air Services ramp in June 1961. Detail of the custom Cinerama nose are clearly seen with the wrap-around nose glass and the additional windows. The B-25H wore this scheme from 1956 until it was repainted by Tallmantz after the company was established in November 1961. (J.D. Davis)

*Seven Wonders of the World* were also inserted through the completed project. The film was released in September 1957.

In February 1957, photos suggest that Mantz used *The Smasher* to film air-to-air sequences of his Grumman TBF-3C Avenger N9394H marked as French *Aeronavale* aircraft, for the film *Tip*

*On A Dead Jockey*. A sequence in the film also depicts the crash-landing of Mantz Vultee BT-13 N53317. The pilot for that sequence is unknown, but one presumes it was Mantz, Thompson, or Reaver. There is also a "mystery" P-51D seen briefly in the film.

In July 1957, Mantz and company

gained a major role in the production of what would eventually be the stillborn *Deluxe Tour*. As a bit of background, long-time mogul Darryl F. Zanuck left 20th Century-Fox and started his own production company named, not surprisingly, Darryl F. Zanuck Productions, Inc. Zanuck decided one of his first film projects would be *Deluxe Tour*, conceived as a narrative story wrapped into another travelogue film.

Mantz was hired to scout locations in Europe



Desolate view of the two camera ships at a barren Orange County Airport. This was when the planes were in a mainly white and gray scheme post-*Catch-22*. All markings except for the distinctive world maps are gone from the airplane, save the American flag on the tail. N1042B in the background is in a similar scheme. Today, the airfield, now named John Wayne Airport, is completely congested, hazardous, and was recently voted as "angriest airport in the USA." (Dave Welch)