

MYSTERY OF THE EVERGLADES PRIVATEER

HOW A NAVY PATROL BOMBER WENT FROM FRONTLINE SERVICE TO A WEEKEND
HIDEAWAY IN A SWAMP TO A MUSEUM DISPLAY!

BY NICHOLAS A. VERONICO

Air Classics contributor Larry Johnson recently sent in a number of photos in response to "Trojans for Fidel" that appeared in the "Airlines" section of the May 2023 issue (see page 92). Johnson's photos show a number of Invaders at the Miami Airport in September 1960 (see "Airlines," June 2023, page 90). In the background of one image is a Consolidated PB4Y-2 missing its nose, in this Privateer's case a greenhouse nose and not a turret.

The PB4Y-2 in the photo is BuNo 59932, which had an interesting history with the US Navy. The Privateer was accepted on 31 May 1945, at Consolidated Vultee's San Diego factory, and was delivered to the modification center at NAF Litchfield Park, Arizona, on 1 September.

After modifications, in January 1946, BuNo 59932 was towed across the runway and tied-down in the storage area at Litchfield Park. The war was over and 59932, along with dozens of other factory-new Privateers, were held in reserve for future use while the Navy drew down its massive aerial armada.

Two months later, in March 1946, BuNo 59932 was removed from storage and flown to NAS Corpus Christi where she was prepared for squadron service as a PB4Y-2M weather reconnaissance aircraft. Technicians at Corpus Christi began the conversion by stripping all of the patrol bomber's

armament and armor plate. The turrets were replaced with transport covers, except for the nose turret and bombardier's window that had a standard B-24D/PB4Y-1 greenhouse nose glass installed in its place, as well as the forward top turret, which had an observer's dome fitted into the cover. In addition, all of the electronic countermeasures' equipment and antennas were removed, and an SCR-718 high range altimeter, RC-103 and AN/ARN-5

The Privateer fuselage upon arrival at the Droznenks' property in the Everglades. (B. Droznenk)

low approach equipment, AN/CRC-7 emergency VHF transmitter, and AN/ANQ-1A wire recorder were installed.

For the aerologist, an R88-1-170 air position indicator, recording accelerometer, VG-TA acceleration versus time recorder, barograph, aneroid barometer, and ML-313/AN psychrometer (to accurately measure the temperature and humidity conditions of the upper air of the atmosphere) were fitted.

When flying weather reconnaissance flights, all four bomb bay compartments carried fuel cells, and the aircraft was flown with a crew consisting of two pilots, one relief pilot, a navigator, one aerologist, and four other men to act as radio/radar operators and observers. For the PB4Y-2M, the navigator's station was moved directly behind the pilot, with the navigator facing aft to take advantage of the bulkhead as a way to brace himself. The radio and radar operators were given shoulder restraints that were secured into the structure of the seat, and the entire crew was located in the forward

fuselage compartment. Once the modifications were made, the aircraft was waterproofed to the greatest extent possible. Particular attention was paid to waterproofing the Cannon plugs leading to the propeller governors since patrol



squadrons in the Pacific Theater had suffered a number of failures during flights in torrential rains.

Nearly nine months after delivery, 59932 reached its first squadron assignment with Weather Reconnaissance Squadron Three (VPW-3), flying from Miami, Florida. On 15 November 1946,



Parked on the flight line at the Naval Air Development Center in Philadelphia, PB4Y-2 Privateer BuNo 59932 was used as a chase aircraft supporting a number of different programs. The former patrol bomber's nose, top, side, and tail turrets have been removed and the spaces faired over. The nose turret and bombardier's window have been removed and replaced with a greenhouse nose from an early B-24 Liberator. (USN)