

# MAPLE LEAF AVENGERS



Squadron patch for VT-5 Torpcats.

**B**y the conclusion of the Second World War, Grumman and Eastern had built a stunning 9837 variants of the TBF/TBM Avenger torpedo-bomber. When the Bureau of Aeronautics wanted to concentrate on the new F6F Hellcat fighter, production of the Avenger was transferred to General Motors' Eastern Aircraft Division and that company completed 7546 TBMs. The TBF was Grumman's first attempt to design and build a torpedo-bomber for the US Navy and it would serve as a replacement for the unsuccessful Douglas TBD-1 Devastator. Ordered during April 1940, the prototype XTBF-1 flew on 1 August 1941, giving an idea of the urgency of the project. By January 1942, the first production models were joining the Fleet and the type received its Avenger name after the Japanese sneak attack on

Cold War and western nations were worried about the Soviets' growing military capabilities — especially in submarine warfare. History would later show that the Soviet "threat" was composed mainly of propaganda and the military threat from that nation was greatly exaggerated but the fear of such capabilities sent non-communist nations on a buying spree to acquire masses of military equipment to counter the "Red Menace."

Because of its commitment to the United Kingdom and the newly-formed NATO, initial plans for an ASW aircraft specified the anti-submarine mission was going to seven-days-a-week, 24-hours-a-day. The ships and aircraft that would be utilized in the ASW mission had to be capable of searching out and destroying Soviet submarines anywhere in the maritime world. To achieve this goal, the Royal Canadian Navy came up with a set of requirements in their search for an ASW platform:

- 1) The aircraft was to be capable of being flown in fair and foul weather with a minimum of effort for the pilot. An aircraft that was inherently stable, equipped with an automatic pilot, and having good deck-landing characteristics was considered ideal;
- 2) Aircraft required an endurance of over five hours. Four hours on patrol was to be the aim when designing the aircraft, allowing a suitable fuel reserve for relief on station and for

Pearl Harbor. War-time exploits of the Avenger could fill many issues of this magazine but for this article we want to look at Canada's operation of the type and then concentrate on just one aircraft — BuNo 53858.

With the end of the war, the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) decided to divest itself of the Fairey Firefly aircraft that were in service. The Canadians knew that several thousand Avengers were being held in storage by the US Navy and some of these aircraft had very low flying times. Realizing the importance of anti-submarine warfare, the RCN was going to base a great deal of its combat doctrine on searching for and destroying possible enemy submarines. During the first part of the Battle of the Atlantic, German U-Boats had nearly put a strangle-hold on the vital convoys heading to Europe and no one wanted a repeat of that episode.

This was the beginning of the

IT HAS BEEN A LONG TIME COMING, BUT THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE CANADIAN WARPLANE HERITAGE HAVE DONE THEMSELVES PROUD WITH THE FIRST FLIGHT OF THEIR RESTORED GRUMMAN AVENGER. WE ALSO EXAMINE THE USE OF THE TYPE IN ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY SERVICE

BY DOUG FISHER

Gear coming up, James Bradley lifts off on 1 May for the Avenger's first post-restoration flight. (DF)