

# YANKS NORSEMAN AIRBORNE

Brad and Ryan over the desert near Palm Springs. The Norseman was on its fourth flight.



THE RESTORATION CREW AT YANKS AIR MUSEUM HAS TURNED A SUNKEN DERELICT INTO A MAGNIFICENT FLYING MACHINE  
BY MICHAEL O'LEARY

Yanks Air Museum is known as the 'All-American' museum," said museum founder Charles Nichols last year as he surveyed the nearly-complete Noorduyn UC-64A Norseman that occupied a chunk of the restoration shop. Why is a Canadian-designed and built aircraft part of a museum whose stated purpose is to preserve and operate aircraft built in the United States? "Actually, it's a pretty good question," said Charles. "Our first curator was Stanton 'Stan' Hoefler and he was a good friend as well as an excellent curator who was responsible for many of our acquisitions and restorations. During the Second World War, Stan was a B-17 Flying Fortress pilot with the 553rd Bombardment Squadron, 381st Bombardment Group, and we have quite a bit of his wartime memorabilia on display.

"Stan would recount a story on how he, and rest of the pilots, hated the Norseman. By that, I mean they hated the sound the aircraft's engine made. When a Norseman came in for a very early morning landing at their base, Stan and the other men knew it was arriving with orders for the day's bombing mission and that they would not be getting any more sleep. The UC-64A would be bringing in secret orders for the day's target and the pilots all knew they would be facing the *Luftwaffe's* fighters and *flak* and that some of them probably would not be coming back.

"So, when I had a chance to purchase a UC-64 I knew it was Canadian designed and built but I also knew I would be painting it up in the colors and markings of Stan's Bomb Group. I figured it would be a good way to honor him and all the work he did to preserve aviation history. Plus, the majority of Norseman production went to the USAAF and the type flew in all combat theaters."

"The aircraft was pretty much a mess when it arrived at Yanks," said Casey Wright who is the head of restorations for the museums. "Initially, in 2010 we stuffed it in a hangar and then brought it into the shop after we



Logo for Noorduyn Aviation.

cleared off space to start restoration." The Norseman is a big plane and it takes up a lot of room. This aircraft started out life as USAAF 43-5148 but instead of going to the USAAF, it was almost immediately transferred to the Royal Canadian Air Force to bolster their much smaller force of Norsemans. With the RCAF, it was taken on strength on 10 June 1943 and became RCAF 790. Finished in a bright overall yellow scheme, 790 performed training duties and was upgraded to a Mk. VI.

"After the war, the Canadians still had use for the Norseman since many RCAF bases were 'in the bush' and needed something like the Norseman for general transportation and light cargo duties. Our Norseman has a history in both military and civilian operations," commented Casey. First, let's take a look on how this most interesting design was created.

## BUILDING A PLANE FOR THE BUSH

How does one go about creating what will become one of the world's great bush aircraft? Much of the vast nation of Canada is comprised of what pilots call "the bush" — remote areas that can basically be reached only by aircraft. Planes that operate in such territory have to be as rugged and uncompromising as the bush itself. First of all, it takes talent and experience to come up with such a design. Robert B.C. "Bob" Noorduyn had plenty of both. As a younger man, he had worked for Fokker and Bellanca. Both of those companies had aircraft flying in the Canadian bush but they were not specifically created for that task. Noorduyn made the wise decision