



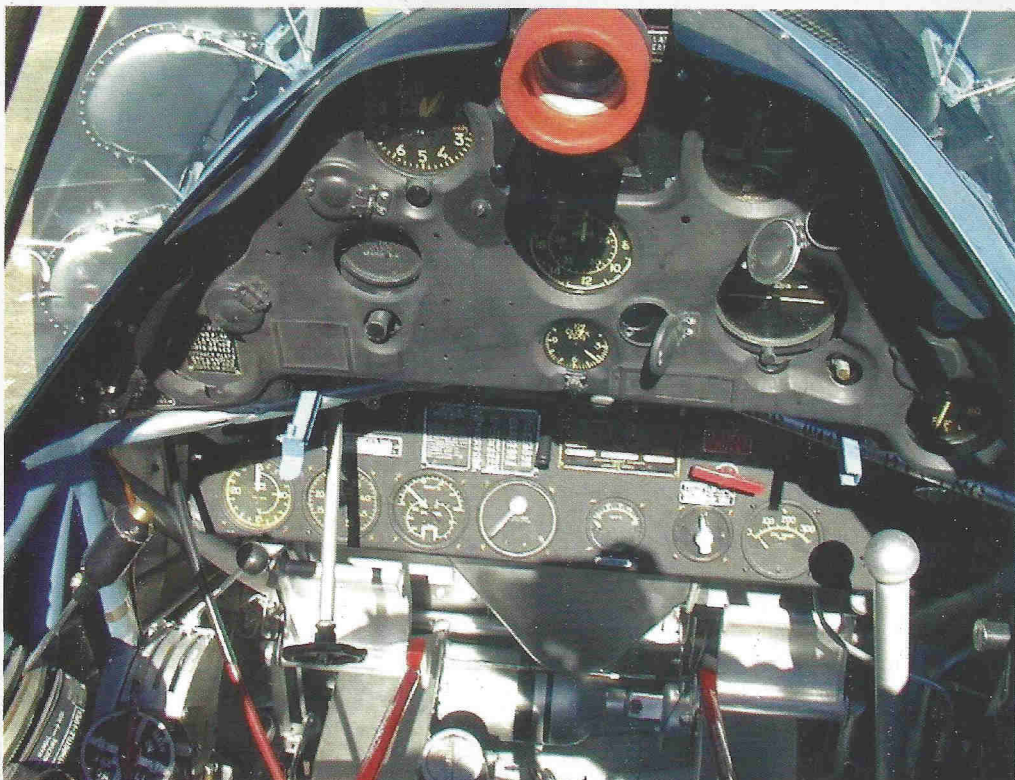
WELL VINDICATED

MOST RECENT and one of the most important restorations to be completed by the National Museum of Naval Aviation at Pensacola, Florida, is Vought SB2U-2 Vindicator BuNo 1383 – the last of its type in existence. This aircraft was among those recovered from Lake Michigan, and it arrived at the NMNA in 1990. Over the course of eight years a painstaking restor-

ation programme was undertaken, which had to be fitted in among various other projects on the other 'Ladies of the Lake'. The SB2U was designed to meet a US Navy requirement for a carrier-based scout-bomber and first flew in 1936. At the time it represented a major leap forward, being the first low wing monoplane to have both foldable wings and re-

tractable undercarriage in US Navy service. Such were Navy concerns at the time, that Vought was asked to develop a competing biplane scout-bomber – the XSB3U-1 – as 'insurance'. Powered by a 825hp (615kW) Pratt & Whitney R-1535 Twin Wasp Junior, the SB2U was ordered into production as the Vindicator, with 169 being built in three versions.

Vindicators saw action during the Battle of Midway in 1942, but after this were retired to second line duties. Orders for a version for the French Air Force – the V-156B – were partially met before the fall of France. Fifty V-156B-1s were ordered by the British Fleet Air Arm and entered service as the Chesapeake I advanced trainers.



Above: On February 5 the SB2U was rolled out into the Florida sunshine, an immaculate restoration by any standards.

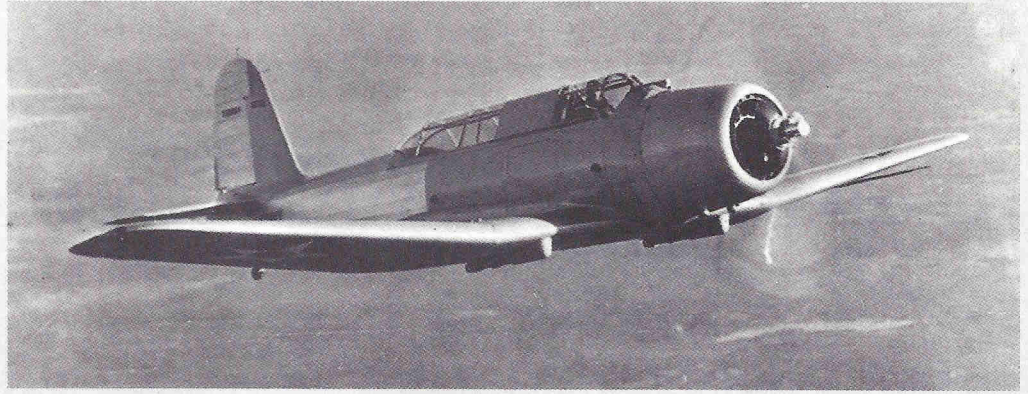
Left: The quality of the restoration extends to the cockpit as well – workmanship is second to none.

Opposite from the top:
The prototype Vindicator, the XSB2U-1 during an early test flight, 1936. FlyPast collection
Work nears its conclusion on the SB2U-2. The design was considered very advanced when it was first introduced in 1936.
The Pratt & Whitney R-1535 Twin Wasp Junior and its associated assembly undergoes finishing touches.
Work underway on the firewall and wings.
The Vindicator looking far from complete in 1998 but in fact about 80% along the way.
The restoration team takes time off for a 'crew shot'. In all, they have devoted 20,000 man hours of tender, loving care to the project.

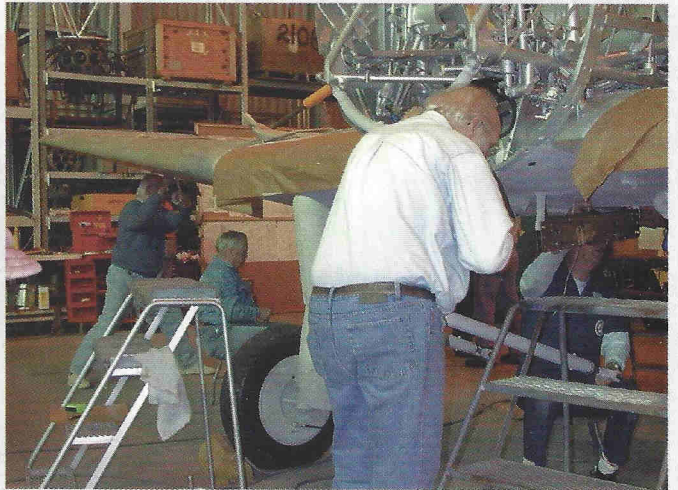
All illustrations National Museum of Naval Aviation unless noted.

The NMNA Vindicator project suffered initially from having very little official reference material. Plans for the type, which were uncovered in the National Archives in Washington DC, revealed that some of the work was incorrect and needed to be redone. Despite these problems the team persevered and after 20,000 man hours the SB2U-2 was finally rolled out into the Florida sunshine on February 5. Quite astonishingly the aircraft is believed to be between 90 and 95% original — an indication of its condition after some 47 years on the lake bed.

Keen to show off its latest marvel, the NMNA has already put the aircraft on display within the main exhibition halls. The last pilot of this particular aircraft, A W Lemmons, now a 78-year-old retired Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel, missed the net barrier while attempting to land aboard the USS *Wolverine* on June 21, 1943, and went off the front of the



ship and into the lake. He was rescued after 20 minutes and went on to complete 53 combat missions. While Lt Col Lemmons may look on the loss of 1383 as a regrettable accident, in a manner of speaking that action served to allow later generations to appreciate Vought's scout-bomber in all its glory. By the time these words are read, Lemmons should have visited the NMNA to take a look at the 'one that got away'.
Mark Nicholls



From the Workshop in the June issue features SABENA Old-Timers and their Lodestar and Lysander projects - on sale May 1.