

**BRINGING HITLER'S HENCHMEN TO JUSTICE**

November 2010 | Volume 35 | Number 11

**THE**  
**DISPATCH**  
The Official Magazine of the Commemorative Air Force



**REAPING THE**  
*Whirlwind*

**PYROS OF THE CAF**  
**AVENGER TURNED SUB HUNTER**  
**CONFEDERATE PLOT TO KILL GEN. ULYSSES S. GRANT**

# THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN WING'S TBM AVENGER



In 1984, Rocky Mountain Wing Leader Col Del Coulson requested that the CAF's Grumman TBM Avenger N53503 be assigned to the Wing. Thus began a major restoration project taking over four years.

Developed for the United States Navy and Marine Corps, the TBM Avenger torpedo bomber entered U.S. service in 1942. It first saw action during the Battle of Midway.

## HISTORY OF BU NO 53503

The CAF's TBM Avenger BuNo 53503 was accepted by the U.S. Navy on June 1, 1945, at the Norfolk NAS. It was assigned to the VT-75 Squadron. In 1947, it was transferred to VT-82 Squadron stationed at the Naval Air Reserve Training at Los Alamitos in southern California.

In 1950, TBM 53503 was lend/leased to the Royal Canadian Navy. It was one of 125 TBMs modified by the Fairey Aviation Company for modern anti-submarine warfare (ASW) roles, including improved radar, electronic countermeasures (ECM) equipment, and sonobuoys. The upper ball turret was replaced with a sloping glass canopy that was better suited for observation duties.

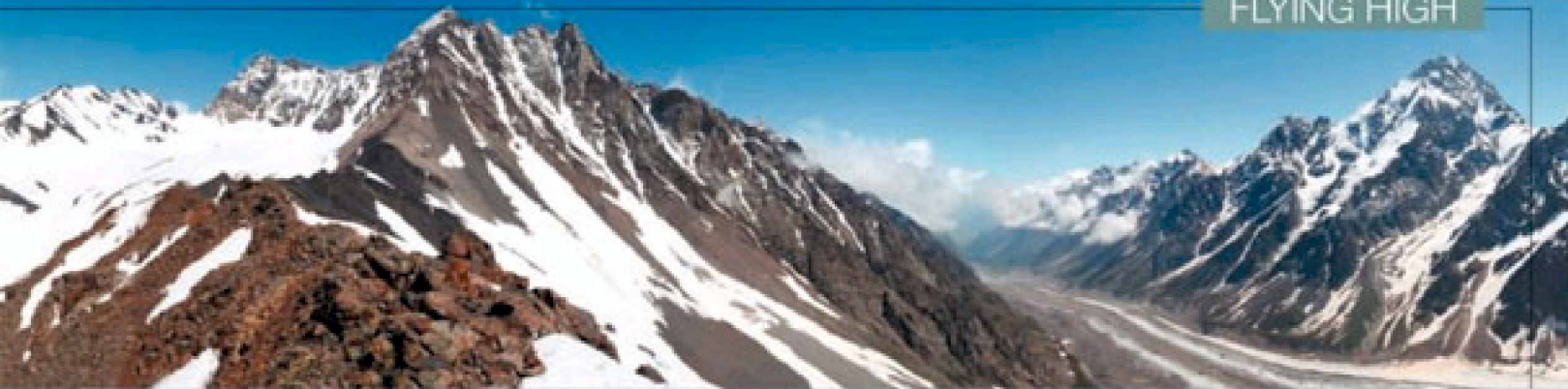
The TBM 53503 was re-designated AS-3 and flew in the RCN 881 Squadron from the carrier HMCS *Magnificent* and marked as sub hunter. The Avenger finished its RCN military career in 1958.

From 1963 to 1970, the CAF's TBM was used as an aerial insecticide applicator in Simsbury, Conn. Acquired by the CAF in 1970, it flew with the CAF Ghost Squadron until 1981. During this time, the Avenger was featured in the movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

From 1981 until mid-1985, the Avenger was waiting for her next duty assignment in desperate need of maintenance and repair. On Jan. 17, 1985, the TBM was officially assigned to the Rocky Mountain Squadron and flown to Grand Junction, Colo., to begin extensive restoration. Money for the restoration came from several \$3,500 sponsorships and many smaller but equally important donations. Volunteer work parties happened every Saturday.

By July of 1989, the TBM was once again ready for duty, complete with the installation of the dorsal gun turret. It was painted as a TBM assigned to VT-84, also known as the "Wolf Gang" squadron, aboard the USS *Bunker Hill*. This squadron was the first to attack Tokyo on Feb. 16 & 17, 1945, and the colorful yellow cowling was adopted to enhance identification as friendly when returning to the fleet from their raid.

The Avenger's first CAF AIRSHO was in Harlingen, Texas, in 1990. Since then the venerable aircraft has been on the air show circuit promoting the goals and objectives of the CAF.



CAF Col Bob Thompson stands on the wing of the TBM at the 2006 AIRSHO.

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN WING

The Rocky Mountain Wing (RMW) was first formed as a squadron in Grand Junction, Colo., in 1981. By 1988, the unit had grown to official CAF Wing status. During this time, the unit acquired a hangar that had been scheduled to be demolished by the airport. It was moved to a new site with ample ramp space. After modifying it to accept the 16 ft tall tail of the TBM, the Wing had an indoor facility in which to work.

By the time the TBM project was completed in 1989, the wing had grown to over 50 members. Air shows became the new source of revenue and member participation.

In 1996 the RMW acquired a Piper J-3 Cub, also known in the military as the Grasshopper. This type aircraft had the military designation of L-4 in

the Army Air Corps and NE-1 in the Navy. The Wing grew in membership with this addition of another flying aircraft.

The Wing's next project, in 1998-99, was to expand the facility by building an "O" Club and meeting room with amenities. Again membership grew, this time to over 65 Colonels. This facility now houses a collection of World War II memorabilia and hosts many groups from the Grand Junction area.

In 2000 the Wing decided to give the J-3 Cub its own hangar. This building project was undertaken and completed by CAF volunteers. On Armed Forces Day in May the RMW holds an open house and "hangar sale" to raise public awareness of the CAF. ■