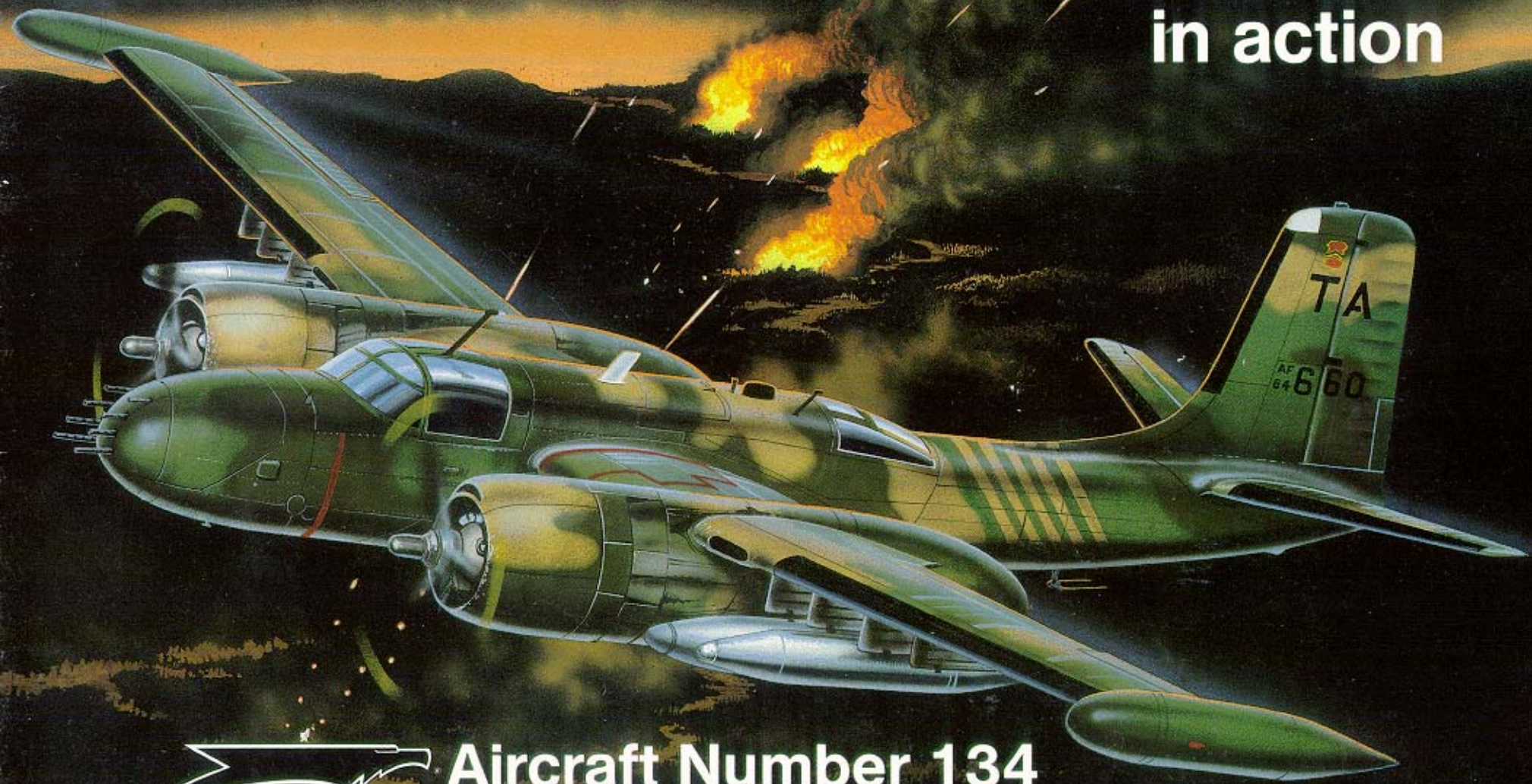


A-26 INVADER

in action



 Aircraft Number 134
squadron/signal publications



An A-26A (B-26K) of the 609th Special Operations Squadron, 56th Special Operations Wing, attacks targets along the Ho Chi Minh trail during 1969. The unit flew missions over Laos and North Vietnam from Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base using the call sign *Nimrod*.



Introduction

As war clouds began to gather over Europe during the late 1930s, certain American political and military leaders began to push for a modernization of the U.S. Armed Forces. These leaders realized that if fighting broke out, America would eventually become involved. The aviation industry, still caught up in the aftermath of the depression, was eager to submit new proposals to the government for consideration. One of the leading aviation companies, Douglas Aircraft, decided to design a new type of aircraft for the Army Air Corps: a light twin engine attack aircraft. Douglas felt that the single engine attack aircraft then in service would be obsolete in modern aerial warfare and a new approach was needed. The company decided to gamble on this decision and work began on the design before the Army even formulated a request for such an aircraft.

Eventually, under the direction of Jack Northrop and Ed Heinemann, the design emerged as the Model 7A. The Army, in the meantime, had formulated their requirements and these were issued in the Fall of 1937. Work began on a new version to meet this requirement without the help of Northrop who had decided to leave Douglas to form his own company. The new design, the Model 7B, went through a number of changes and finally evolved as the A-20 Havoc, one of the finest light bombers of Second World War.

As Douglas began production of the A-20, which first saw action in French service during the Spring of 1940, company officials began to formulate a new proposal for an aircraft to supplement the various twin engine light and medium bomber/attack aircraft then in service. During early 1941, Heinemann and project engineer Robert Donovan began work on this new aircraft. They decided to make the aircraft as advanced as possible and used various concepts and components which were considered state-of-the-art

The prototype XA-26 flies over California during the initial flight testing of the new Douglas aircraft. The aircraft made its first flight on 10 July 1942 with Ben Howard at the controls. Howard enthusiastically told Army officials that the A-26 was ready for service but, unfortunately, it would not see widespread use until the last ten months of the war. (AFM)



for the time. The twin engine design that evolved featured a mid-mounted, laminar flow airfoil wing fitted with double slotted, electrically operated flaps. In order to streamline the aircraft and conserve weight, defensive armament was concentrated in remote controlled dorsal and ventral turrets which were under the control of a gunner in the rear fuselage. Certain features from the A-20 design were also incorporated, including a tri-cycle landing gear, a large bomb bay in the fuselage and additional bomb racks under the wings. The aircraft was to be powered by two 2,000 hp eighteen cylinder Pratt and Whitney R-2800 air-cooled radial engines.

With the basic layout in hand, work began on the construction of a full scale mockup. Officials from the Air Corps looked over the wood mockup during mid-April of 1941 and, liking what they saw, recommended that Douglas be given a contract to develop the design. Approval for two prototypes was received from Washington on 2 June and Douglas began work immediately on the prototypes. At the end of June, Douglas was informed that the Army wanted a third prototype and the initial contract was changed to incorporate this increase. The new aircraft was designated the XA-26 and the three prototypes were to be built at Douglas, El Segundo Division. As a result each prototype had the letters -DE added to their designation which stood for Douglas, El Segundo.

Heinemann and his design team had engineered the XA-26 so that the basic aircraft could be easily modified to fill a variety of roles with relatively minor changes. The initial prototype, the XA-26-DE, was a three-man attack bomber with a transparent nose for the bombardier/navigator. The second aircraft, the XA-26A-DE, was a two-man night-fighter which carried an AI radar in the nose and four 20MM cannons in a ventral tray under the bomb bay. The last prototype, the XA-26B-DE, carried a three man crew like

The second prototype, the XA-26A, was designed as a night fighter with an AI radar in the nose. Armament consisted of a ventral gondola housing four 20MM cannons under the bomb bay, along with the dorsal machine gun turret. It never went into production since it offered no significant improvement over the Northrop P-61 Black Widow. (AFM)

