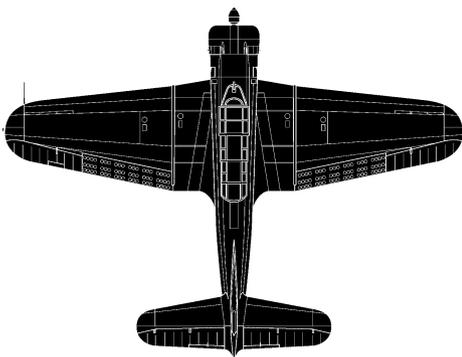


Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

SBD Dauntless



On June 4, 1942, the Navy's SBD Dauntless dive bombers changed the course of World War II. These Douglas aircraft, at the Battle of Midway, sank three Japanese carriers in just six minutes. After sending to the bottom *Akagi*, *Kaga*, and *Soryu*, the Navy aircraft a few hours later finished off a fourth, *Hiryu*. Though the SBD made its greatest mark at Midway, it served brilliantly, especially at the Battle of the Coral Sea and in the Solomons.

The SBD design can be traced to the Northrop XBT-2. Douglas acquired Northrop in 1937, giving its name to the new aircraft. The first production model became the SBD-1 (Scout Bomber Douglas-1). The National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics, a federal agency, worked closely with both Northrop and Douglas on cleaning up the

design. One result: the much debated perforated "Swiss cheese" dive flaps, which permitted the Dauntless to dive steeply without gaining excessive speed. The well-designed SBD served as the Navy's front-line dive bomber until late 1943, when it was superseded by the SB2C Helldiver.

The Dauntless' accurate dive bombing capability proved to be vitally important in naval and land battles in the Pacific. (The USAAF version, called A-24, took part in combat in Indonesia, New Guinea, and the Gilbert Islands.) The all-metal SBD could survive major battle damage, and its heavy armament made it a formidable opponent.

—Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: US Navy SBD Dauntless—No. B4—as it looked in early 1942 when assigned to VB-6 aboard USS *Enterprise* in the Pacific.



A Dauntless on the hunt.

In Brief

Designed, built by Douglas ★ first flight May 1, 1940 ★ crew of two ★ number built 5,936 ★ one Wright R-1820-60 Cyclone engine **Specific to SBD-5:** max speed 255 mph ★ cruise speed 185 mph ★ max range 1,565 mi ★ armament two .50-cal machine guns; two .30-cal machine guns; one 1,600-lb bomb; two 325-lb bombs ★ weight (max) 10,700 lb ★ span 41 ft 7 in ★ length 33 ft 1 in ★ height 13 ft 7 in.

Famous Fliers

Medal of Honor: William Hall, John Powers (WWII) **Notables:** Richard Best, Turner Caldwell, Cook Cleland, Robert Elder, Earl Gallaher, Elmer Glidden, Maxwell Leslie, Richard Mangrum, Wade McClusky, Joseph Sailer, Wallace Short, D. W. Shumway, Stanley Vejtasa.

Interesting Facts

Flown by US Navy, USMC, USAAF, Royal New Zealand Air Force, French Air Force, French Navy, Chile, Mexico, and Morocco ★ piloted by Stanley "Swede" Vejtasa who, when attacked by three Zeros, destroyed all three ★ spun off as USAAF A-24, identical except for tailhook and inflatable tail wheel ★ saw combat against Japanese forces on Dec. 7, 1941 at Pearl Harbor ★ became first US airplane to sink a Japanese ship (Dec. 10, 1941) ★ nicknamed Slow But Deadly, Barge, Clunk, Speedy-D, Speedy-3, Banshee (A-24) ★ used not only in anti-ship but also anti-sub warfare, photo reconnaissance, training, and policing roles ★ shown in many films, often mistakenly identified as a Japanese dive bomber.