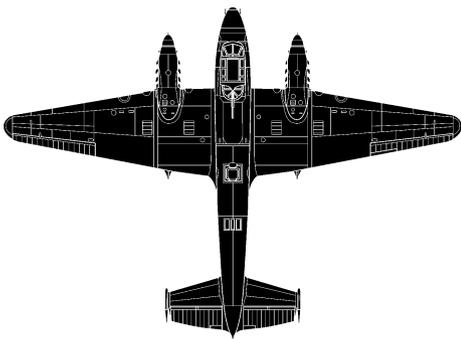


Pe-2



The Pe-2 dive-bomber was, by all accounts, one of World War II's best attack aircraft—fast, rugged, maneuverable, and deadly. The aircraft was designed by engineer Vladimir M. Petlyakov during his stay in a Soviet prison. He was a victim of Stalin's paranoia, arrested in 1937 on trumped-up charges of sabotaging the new ANT-42 bomber. Still, when given the task, Petlyakov delivered. The Pe-2 was so fast that it frequently eluded German interceptors.

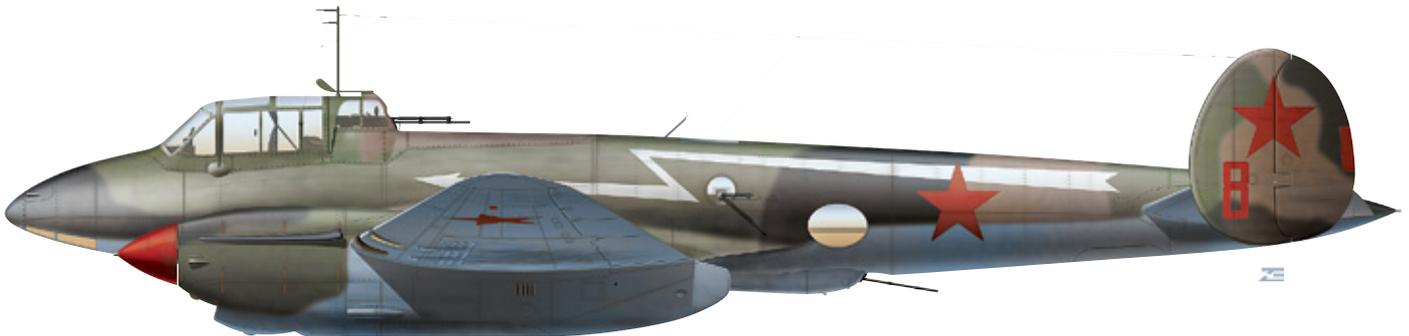
The aircraft that became the Pe-2 began life as the VI-100, a highly advanced bomber escort that flew in late 1939. Impressed by Luftwaffe dive-bombing success, however, Stalin ordered Petlyakov to redesign his fighter into a dive-bomber. Petlyakov complied—in a mere 45 days. The resulting all-metal, low-wing Pe-2 was lighter

than its nearest counterpart, the RAF Mosquito. Stalin put it into serial production in late 1940, and it thus was ready for combat when, in June 1941, Germany invaded. The aircraft showed excellent dive-bombing and ground-attack performance. Born fast, the Pe-2 became faster as it acquired more-powerful engines.

The aircraft was versatile, enjoying great success in roles of attack, reconnaissance, and night fighting. Aircrews developed deadly “sniper” accuracy for their dive-bombing sorties. The Soviet Air Force also developed so-called “carousel” tactics, in which bombers 1,500 feet apart would circle a target and then pounce, diving at angles of up to 70 degrees onto a ground target. After the war, a few Eastern Bloc air forces flew the Pe-2, known to NATO as “Buck.” It went out of service in 1954.

—Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: Soviet Air Force Pe-2 Bort 8 Red as it appeared in August 1945 when assigned to 34th Bomber Air Regiment in Nikolayevka.



In Brief

Designed by Vladimir Petlyakov ★ built at Kazan Aviation Plant ★ first flight Dec. 15, 1940 ★ crew of three—pilot, navigator-bombardier, gunner-radio operator ★ number built 11,400 ★ two Klimov M-105 liquid-cooled V-12 engines ★ armament two forward-firing and two rearward-firing 7.62 mm ShKAS machine guns (later, 12.7 mm guns) ★ ordnance load up to 3,250 lb of bombs ★ max speed 335 mph ★ cruise speed 265 mph ★ max range 930 mi ★ weight (loaded) 18,780 lb ★ span 56 ft 3 in ★ length 41 ft 6 in ★ height 13 ft 1 in.

Famous Fliers

Notables: Maria Dolina, Nadezhda Fedutenko, Klavdia Fomicheva, Alexei Khripkov, Valentin Markov, V. E. Nestertsev, I. S. Polbin, Pyotr Stefanovski, A. Tsurtsulin. **Test pilots:** Georgy Baydukov, N. Fedorov.

Interesting Facts

Flown by unusually large number of women pilots ★ took the life of Petlyakov in 1942 crash ★ built in 17 variants ★ used against Soviets by Finns flying captured models (supplied by Germany) ★ nicknamed “Peshka”—“Pawn”—by Soviet pilots ★ made conspicuous contributions in battles for Moscow, Stalingrad, Kursk, and Berlin ★ assigned initially to front-line ground units ★ stalled at high angles of attack ★ equipped with ShKAS machine gun that could easily jam.



Pe-2 bombers on a mission over the Karelian Isthmus in the summer of 1944.

TASS photo by G. Chernov