

PV-2 Harpoon

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On September 4, 1947, Ensign Richard Donelson and his co-pilot, Lieutenant Raymond Soelter, ditched a Lockheed PV-2 Harpoon roughly 1,000 yards north of the end of the runway at Sand Point. The aircraft sank in about 140 feet of water, and now sits almost completely vertically.

Background Information

- Manufacturer: Lockheed (Vega) Aircraft Division
- Type: Twin-engine patrol-bomber
- Crew: Four or five
- Power Plant: two 2000 hp R-2800-31 engines
- Dimensions: span, 74 ft. 11 in.; length, 52 ft.; height, 11 ft. 11 in.; wing area, 686 sq. ft.
- Weight: empty, 21,028 lbs; gross, 36,000 lb.
- Performance: Maximum speed, 282 mph at 13,700 ft.; cruising speed, 171 mph; initial climb, 1,630 ft. per min; service ceiling, 23,900 ft.; range, 1,790 miles.
- Armament: five fixed forward-firing 0.5 in. guns in nose; two flexible 0.5 inch guns in dorsal turret. Up to four 1,000 lb. bombs internal and two 1,000 lb. bombs external. The Lockheed PV-2 Harpoon was a major redesign of the PV-1 Ventura to optimize it for the maritime reconnaissance role. The redesign turned out to be so major that it was assigned a new basic model number of Vega Model 15.

The Harpoon shared the same power plant and twin tailed configuration of the Ventura but had longer constant-taper wings, a rectangular tail-plane, larger vertical stabilizers and rudder, increased fuel capacity, increased armament, and a larger bomb bay to completely enclose a torpedo. The new improvements did not make the Harpoons any more popular with their crews.

Some Harpoons saw action during the last year of the (WWII) Pacific campaigns, but most Harpoons were used by US Navy Reserve units after the end of the war. At one time, Harpoons equipped eleven VP squadrons of the Naval Reserve. The Harpoon was finally phased out of service in August 1948. Several Harpoons ended up on the commercial market after being declared surplus to Navy requirements. Some were modified as private transports with deluxe interiors and a few were modified as agricultural spray planes. Robert Mester has stated that he believes this aircraft is a rare PV2-D "strafer" model of which only 35 were built. The "D" model differed from the standard Harpoon by having a reconfigured nose which held eight fixed forward-firing .50 caliber machine guns instead of the usual five. Because the nose of this aircraft is buried in the mud, the aircraft's "unique tail configuration and the location of the belly windows" led Mester to this conclusion. On the basis of the rarity of the "D" model, Washington's Office of Historic Preservation has deemed the aircraft eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and the State Register of Historic places.

The aircraft is the property of the US Navy, which prohibits the removal of artifacts from the site.

PV-2 Harpoon, BuNo 37528 From Navy Accident Report NAS Seattle at Sand Point September 4, 1947

On September 4, 1947, Ensign Richard Donelson and his co-pilot, Lieutenant Raymond Soelter, ditched a PV-2 Harpoon roughly 1,000 yards north of the end of the runway at Sand Point. The Aircraft Accident Report for this incident states:

The pilot stated the controls were checked prior to taxiing and worked satisfactorily. Before the takeoff run, the pilot set the elevator tab at the 5° nose up position. During the takeoff run, the pilot states that the tail was slow lifting and that he rolled the nose down tab # of degrees unknown. The tail raised satisfactorily and to aid in becoming airborne the pilot rolled the tab towards the nose up position, # of degrees were not checked. The aircraft did not respond to movements of the elevator controls, although the pilot stated he could feel pressure on the controls indicating that the elevator was functioning normally.

There were many eyewitnesses to this accident and all agreed that the speed of the aircraft at last of run was more than sufficient for takeoff. Switches were out at the end of the runway, the flaps were lowered, the wheels remained extended, and the aircraft was ditched approximately 1,000 yards off the end of the runway. When the aircraft left the runway, it had between 0 and 3 feet of altitude and it gained approximately 20 feet after the flaps were lowered. The aircraft hit the water in 3 pt. attitude and was reported by pilots and witnesses to have skipped three times before nosing up. This is of interest as the wheels were extended and the witnesses reported that the aircraft skipped off the wheels and not the fuselage. The aircraft was fueled to 800 gallons and 200 lbs. of sand was placed in the aft section giving satisfactory center of gravity. The investigation disclosed that this aircraft had a reputation for the controls being sloppy. This discrepancy had never been reported. The actual cause of the accident cannot be determined because the aircraft was never recovered.

The Aircraft Accident Summary Report for this incident gives the purpose of the flight simply as "bombing," and it gives no detail about the status of the ordinance on board the aircraft. However, it is rumored that a 500 lb. bomb lies on the bottom near the aircraft. It is not known whether this is a dummy practice bomb or not.

PV-2 Harpoon in Lake WashingtonThe aircraft is oriented in a nearly vertical position, with the nose buried approximately 11 feet in the silt up to the cockpit windows. The bottom depth at the cockpit windows is 142 feet and the top of the tail is at approximately 105 feet. The condition of the aircraft is fairly good, except for the vertical stabilizers on the tail, which are badly torn.{gallery}pv2/images{/gallery}