



The Invader in the air. Its speed, climbing power, and maneuverability fit it for its many kinds of missions.

Plane of Many Faces

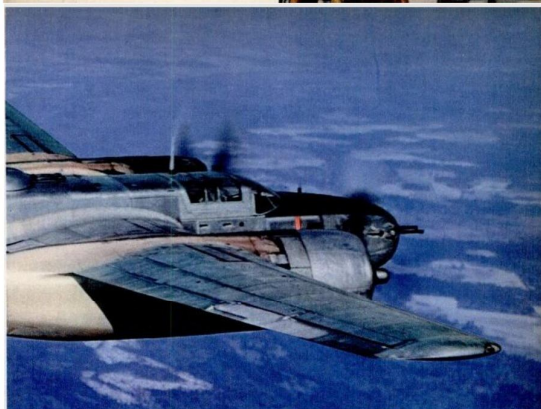
Switching noses makes the A-26 anything from a grass-cutting strofer to a high-level bomber.

By HAL BORLAND

YOU go down the line on an airfield and you see a group of them with cannon in their noses, then a group bristling with machine guns, then a cluster of them with Plexiglas bombardier greenhouses. You wonder if you're seeing things, for the ships all look alike except for the armament in those long, sleek snouts. You're seeing things, all right—you're seeing the Douglas

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MACHINE-GUN NOSE packs six .50 calibers, four on one side and two on the other, for strafing or brushing with enemy fighters. These six guns spit nearly 5,000 bullets a minute, to say nothing of the four additional .50's in the two remote-control turrets.



Nearly a ton of defensive armor shields its vulnerable parts; it can better 200 miles an hour on one engine.

75-MM.-CANNON NOSE carries the big gun hitherto mounted only in the B-25 Mitchell medium bomber. Three other noses offer combinations of a 75 with two .50 calibers; a 37-mm. cannon with four .50's; and a 20-mm. cannon with four .50's. Just take your pick.

BOMBING NOSE is a Plexiglas "greenhouse," here festooned with .50 caliber ammo. Changing over from one nose to another can be done in the field in about eight hours with no special equipment except a crane hoist, which can be improvised easily.



A-26, called the Invader, rigged for just a few of its various missions. Tactically, the Invader is just about the most effective attack bomber in the books.

Watch it take off, as I did recently at the Air Forces Tactical Center in Florida, and follow it for a time in the air and you begin to understand why, new as it is, it is already making a gaudy reputation for itself over enemy territory. Officially it's an attack bomber, but it has more speed than the A-20 Havoc, which can get right out and travel. Yet it has more bomb capacity and a higher ceiling than the B-25 Mitchell, which is rated at 35,000 pounds loaded weight and 25,000-foot ceiling.

For a ship of its size—its wing span is about the same as the B-26 Marauder, but its fuselage is about the length of the Havoc—it takes off in a hurry. It climbs unusually fast, reminding you of a Havoc. Put it alongside a Havoc, however, and it steadily pulls away, proving its extra speed. For a medium bomber, it maneuvers very easily. This is particularly noticeable when it is in the air with a Marauder or a Mitchell,

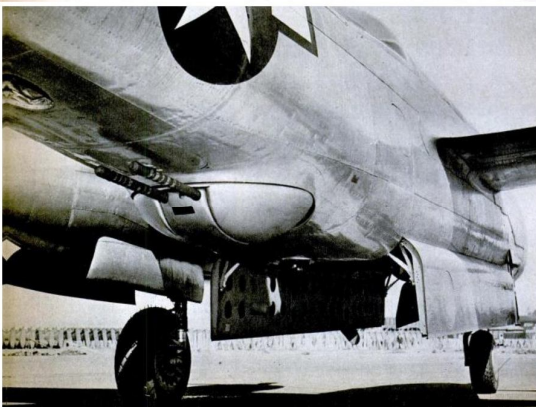
which are not exactly slow in maneuver themselves.

Name your tactical job and the Invader can do it—strafing, ship bombing, high-level bombing, tank busting, pillbox busting, general attack, reconnaissance, smoke laying. It can go anywhere in a hurry, take care of itself in a mix-up with enemy fighters, climb or dive out of trouble, and come home.

Take the factor of armament and you begin to sense why the Invader is already rated the best utility ship in the air. It can mount anything from a 75-millimeter cannon to six .50 caliber machine guns in its nose. It carries additional .50's in upper and lower turrets. It can carry 50 caliber package guns under its wings. Just try to imagine a flight of such ships on a strafing mission!

Further, it is built to take a variety of noses on the standard frame—noses designed for anything from straight bombing to every kind of attack and strafing mission. In addition to an assortment of guns in the nose, both the top and belly turrets are

BOMB BAY AND BELLY TURRET. An extra-large bomb bay enables the Invader to tote a heavy load of explosives. Exact tonnage is secret, but the plane is known to be carrying 50 percent more bomb weight than it was originally designed to handle. Note the two pairs of bomb-bay doors, with belly turret behind the rear pair.



TRICYCLE LANDING GEAR and slender fuselage show up in this rear-end view. Four Douglas-type, double-slotted flaps—two under the wings and two between engine nacelles and fuselage—slow down the "hot" A-26 for landings on short advanced-base fields. Large control surfaces boost maneuverability.

equipped with twin .50's. And there is no reason why such a ship should not mount rockets instead of package guns under its wings.

Yet the Invader can operate with as few as two men, pilot and gunner. There is ample room for a third or even a fourth crewman if needed on a particular mission.

Two things contribute to this ship's versatility and tremendous punch:

First of all, it is fundamentally a fast, rugged ship of excellent design and flight characteristics. An all-metal mid-wing monoplane with single tail and tricycle landing gear, its twin Pratt & Whitney double-row engines develop as much power as the Marauder. Its sleek lines enable it to make the most of that power. All important drag elements have been eliminated or carefully faired in. Pilot's compartment is of teardrop design. Turrets are of low silhouette, close-set—so close that you have to look twice to spot the belly guns.

Second, it can be converted from one job to another by changing noses. This is made possible by standardized design and development of an assortment of noses. Quick conversion does not mean changing the ship's nose in a matter of minutes, but the change can be made in the field in about eight hours with no other special equipment than an improvised crane hoist. Eight hours is a considerable gain over the time need to send a ship to a modification center for conversion.

At present, six different noses are available for use on the Invader. Some of these may be further altered or discontinued, as experience in the field dictates. Each has its special purpose, and none may be considered a "standard nose." Noses now listed, with various combinations of cannon and .50 caliber guns, are:

- 1—Plexiglas "greenhouse" for bombing.
- 2—Metal nose mounting one 75-mm. cannon.

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- 3—Metal nose with one 75 and two .50's.
- 4—Metal nose with one 37-mm. cannon and four .50's.
- 5—Metal nose with one 20-mm. cannon and four .50's.
- 6—Metal nose with six .50's.

Watch the Invader sweep down across a field and you can imagine what the Germans have had to face when this ship was on a strafing mission, with a flock of those .50's spitting hot steel. Or what it can do to a tank column or a group of pillboxes, with that 75 cannon action, supported by all those .50's. And it comes in on such a sweep with baffling speed, gets away in a considerable hurry. If you were trying to face it down with an ack-ack gun you wouldn't get more than a couple of quick glimpses of it before it was gone.

It is easy to imagine what this plane can do on a ship-bombing mission. Its speed and bomb capacity should make it a highly respected ship in that category, for it comes in like the wind, weaves away with exceptional dexterity, and is gone.

Take it on as opponent in the air, and you would have plenty of trouble. Its turrets are of a type used with remote fire control. All four of the .50's in those turrets can be used to ward off attack from the rear or from either side. From the front, it is simply devastating. Offhand, it would seem that this ship has few, if any, vulnerable spots. Its guns can pretty well cover all approaches, and it can throw enough slugs to break the heart of any armorer loading its ammunition boxes.

Its field uses depend entirely on situations

as they arise. It was specially designed to perform any one of a dozen jobs and is not a composite of other models or an adaptation of earlier designs. It was expected to make obsolete three top-ranking planes, all well known for their powers of devastation: the A-20 Havoc attack plane, the B-26 Marauder medium bomber, and the B-25 Mitchell medium bomber and attack plane. That's quite an order, but when you see what it can do you know that these other doughty ships are going to have to step right out to hold their prestige. For here is a ship with more speed, a higher ceiling, and a greater bomb capacity than any of those three; in addition it has considerably more firepower, carries close to a ton of defensive armor, and can cruise at better than 200 miles an hour on one engine. Obviously, a ship that can take as well as give a lot of punishment and still come home.

But it's that interchangeable nose that gives the Invader its tremendous tactical advantage. That's what makes it the equivalent of six ships in one. To remove a nose, which is about six feet long, only six bolts need be removed. When electrical and gun-control cables have been disconnected, the nose can be swung away, a new nose swung into place, fitted there, and bolted. It isn't as simple or as easy as it sounds, but the job can be done between late dawn and early dusk—all connections hooked up, guns loaded, and the ship made ready for a new kind of mission.

The same kind of job can be done for a ship with a damaged nose, too—a great ad-

A QUICK-ACCESS HATCH opens on pilot's teardrop cockpit. The Invader can be fought by two men—pilot and gunner—but there is room for four if the mission calls for them. In this photo you can see clearly where the interchangeable noses join the fuselage, just ahead of the nose-wheel opening.

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SPEEDY ENGINE REPAIRS are made possible by engine-nocalls cowlings that come off in halves. A spark-plug wrench loosens the fastenings, and the top and bottom sections are taken off. Removing or replacing takes only a few minutes. Mechanics like the A-26. "For once," says one, "they thought about the 'mech.'"

vantage from the repair and maintenance point of view. Naturally, after a ship has been in combat and wracked a bit, it isn't as easy to slip a new nose into place as a finicky mechanic might wish. But this ship as a whole gets high praise from the mechs who work on it.

"For once," says one mechanic, "they sweet job for any man's money." That's what the mechanics think of the Invader. When you talk to the pilots you hear the same story from another angle.

"She's a lot of ship," one of them says. "She handles easy. Makes you think of a Havoc, in some ways, but she's got more power. Throttle action gets results right now, and I mean now. She's bigger, of course, but you can wheel her around like a Havoc, and that's saying something. Lots of climb, lots of speed, lots of maneuverability. And plenty of ceiling—plenty. She

were thinking about the mech when they designed her. Why, you can even sit down in the accessory section. Imagine sitting down to change batteries! And the mags are out where you can get at them easy. Engine cowling is in two sections. Engines easy to service. She's a very sweet job, Mister, a very gets away fast and she goes places in a hurry. She can take care of herself, too. Make no mistake about that. As for firepower . . ." He grins and lets it go at that. "You'll hear plenty from this ship, from all theaters. Plenty."

Then you ask the armorer, about her, and he looks up at all those guns and hunches his back, as though thinking of all that ammunition. Then he winks slowly, grins, and says, "There's sure a lot of fight in that ship. No matter what nose they put on her, she's a killer. She's one hell of a fighting ship."