



The completed display in *We Can Do It! WWII*. The propeller is for a SB2C Helldiver dive bomber made by the Curtiss-Wright propeller division, Beaver, Pa., c. 1943.

L2015.44.1. Photo by Liz Simpson.

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Recruitment video for the Curtiss-Wright plant in Beaver, Pa.

## Curtiss-Wright Propeller

By Liz Simpson, Assistant Editor/Assistant Registrar

A propeller on loan to the History Center from the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum helps tell the story of a local Curtiss-Wright plant that thrived briefly during World War II. The Curtiss-Wright Corporation was part of an industrial network producing components for a variety of airplanes in the late 1930s. As war intensified, Curtiss-Wright faced an increasing demand for airplane parts. Despite having plants operating at full capacity in Indiana, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, Curtiss-Wright still could not keep up with demand.

A search was undertaken to find a site for a new plant. In February 1941, the War Department announced the site—a farm in Borough (now Vanport) Township near Beaver, Pa.<sup>1</sup> The \$5 million facility would be “the largest individual aircraft propeller manufacturing plant in the United States” according to the company's president.<sup>2</sup> Once open, the factory brought thousands of new jobs to the area between 1942 and 1945, employing both men and women, especially as welders.

These workers fabricated more than 100,000 new propeller blades for a variety of aircraft each year.

The propeller at the History Center is from a Curtiss Helldiver, a carrier-based dive bomber used in squadron raids against Japan. It was displayed in the *We Can Do It! WWII* exhibit and will be part of the updates coming to the *Pittsburgh: A Tradition of Innovation* exhibit this year.

<sup>1</sup> Some newspaper accounts at the time refer to the land selected as being in “Beaver Township,” probably a corruption of the township's original name “Borough Township.” The official designation was changed to Vanport Township in 1970. The name shift was recorded by the *Beaver County Bicentennial Atlas* (1976), accessed online as part of the Beaver County History Online project: <http://www.bchistory.org/beavercounty/BeaverCountyCommunities/VanportTwp/VanportTownship.html>.

<sup>2</sup> “Big Propeller Plant Will Be Built Near City,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, February 27, 1941.