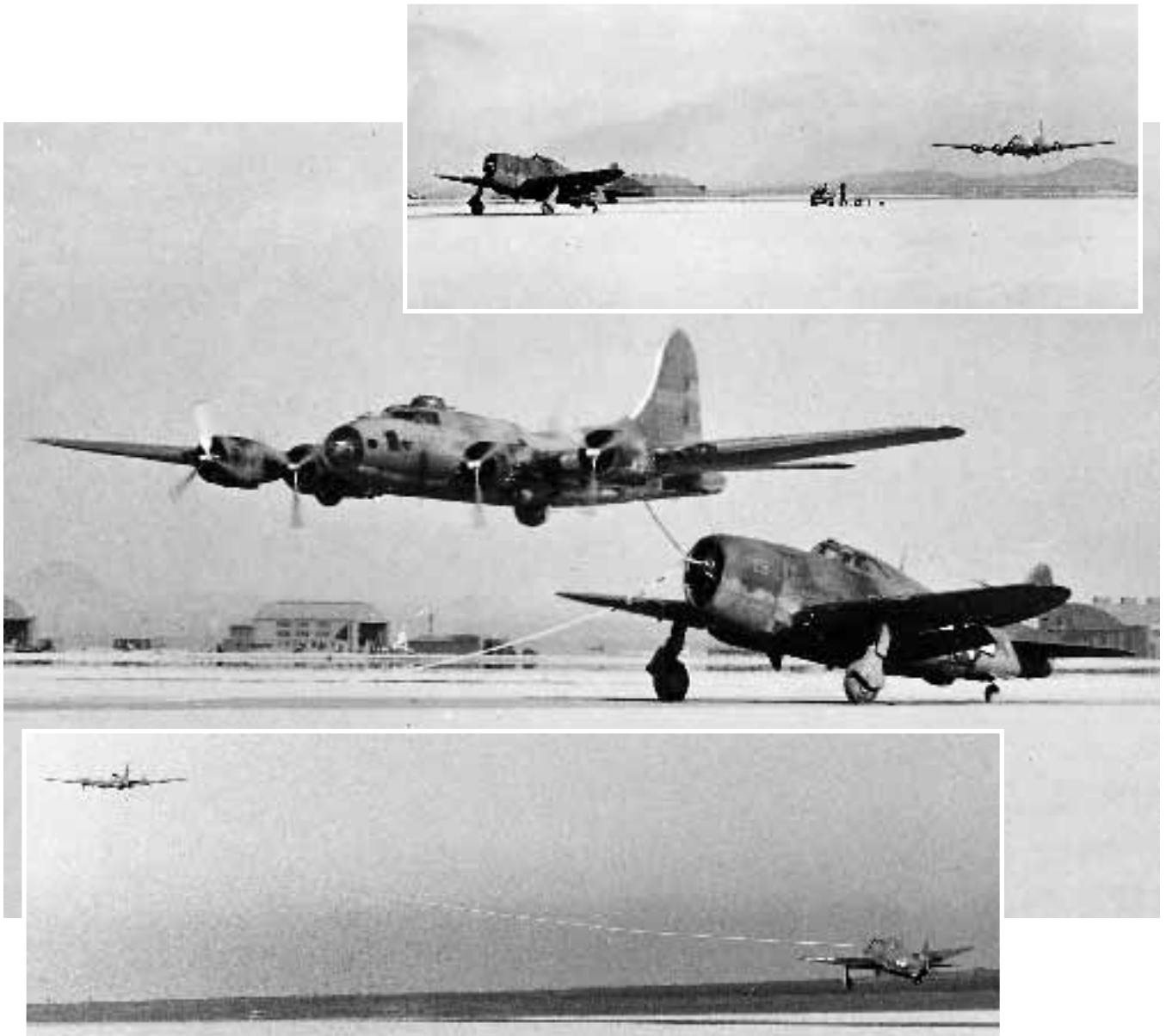


The Airplane Snatchers



US Army Air Forces of World War II hated to lose a serviceable fighter aircraft just because mechanical problems might force it to land in an inaccessible spot. To solve the problem, USAAF's Equipment Laboratory at Wright Field, Ohio, experimented with airplane snatching, seen in this photo sequence in which (top to bottom) a B-17 bomber scoops up a P-47 fighter. First, a tow bridle was attached to the fighter. Then, two upright poles were planted, with the bridle's pick-up loop strung across

them. Next, the rescuing airplane swooped low, dragging an arm tipped with a hook that would snag the loop and yank the 17,000-pound fighter into the air after a takeoff roll of just 500 feet. At home base, the towed aircraft's pilot released from the bomber and made a dead-stick landing. The practice never really caught on.