



Plane Talk

Volume 22, Number 2

The Newsletter of the War Eagles Air Museum

Editorial

By the time you finish this issue of *Plane Talk*, you may experience “*Warhawk Overload*.” What began as a normal “Featured Aircraft” article expanded in the writing and now fills virtually the entire issue.

The P-40’s history is long and complicated, and the amount of information available in books and on-line is overwhelming. It was a challenge to research hundreds of pages of source material and then write an article that would fit into just these few pages. But we hope you find this highly condensed story of one of World War II’s most well-known aircraft interesting, especially because we’re including a lot of “never before seen in print” information. For example, War Eagles Air Museum Director Skip Trammell has logged many hours in the Museum’s 1941 P-40E. In his “From the Director” column, he tells some fascinating anecdotes about his experiences at the controls. We were also fortunate to contact Mr. Eric Mingledorff of Memphis, Tennessee, who, as the previous owner of the Museum’s *Warhawk*, flew her in airshows from 1982 to 1985. His tales of restoring and flying “the sweetest airplane I ever flew” were so detailed that we ran out of space in this issue. You’ll find more from Eric in the next *Plane Talk*.

Finally, in addition to the usual reviewers, this issue benefitted from thorough scrutiny by new Museum employee and aviation enthusiast Chuck Faison and P-40 expert Fred Boucher. Thanks a lot, guys! It’s much better because of you. ☺



Featured Aircraft

Many aircraft have distinctive color schemes that make them instantly recognizable. For instance, Germany’s yellow-nosed Messerschmitt Bf.109s prowled the skies over Europe early in World War II. Later, the famed red-tailed North American P-51 *Mustangs* of the Tuskegee airmen protected American bombers in the same skies. But few aircraft had more striking markings than the shark-mouthed Curtiss P-40 *Warhawks* of the American Volunteer Group (AVG) in China.

Featured Aircraft (Continued on Page 2)

▲ *War Eagles Air Museum Director Skip Trammell flies the Museum’s 1941 Curtiss P-40E Warhawk “Holdin’ My Own” near Hubbard Creek Reservoir, north of Breckenridge, Texas, after performing at the May 1988 Breckenridge Air Show. Photographer Philip Makanna shot this picture from the back seat of a North American AT-6 Texan.*

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From the Director

The story of the Curtiss P-40 *Warhawk* in this issue's "Featured Aircraft" article brought back many poignant memories for me. *Holdin' My Own*, War Eagles Air Museum's exquisite 1941 P-40E, is still one of the finest examples of the type in existence (in my opinion), and she is one of the jewels of the Museum's collection.

I remember well when I first started flying her in the mid-1980's, soon after John MacGuire bought her from Eric Mingledorff, who had fully restored her and had flown her for several years in air shows. My logbook shows more than 250 hours in her. Most of the flights were great fun. Some, however, were not.

Back in the "olden days" before war-bird insurance got prohibitively expensive, we used to attend the big air show every year in Breckenridge, Texas. The late John MacGuire, founder of War Eagles Air Museum, and the late Jack Bell, our former Chief Pilot, flew out in our P-51 *Mustangs*, while I flew the P-40. As we were returning to El Paso after the show one year, things got pretty interesting in a hurry. Just west of Odessa, with no warning whatsoever, the engine quit. You've probably heard the joke that the purpose of the big fan on the front of an airplane is to keep the pilot cool, because you should see how he starts to sweat when the fan quits. Well, I was really sweating. I switched fuel tanks and managed to restart the engine, but it was running really rough. I radioed to John and

From the Director (Continued on page 8)

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Featured Aircraft (Continued from page 1)

In the late 1930's, officers in the U.S. Army Air Corps viewed the role of aircraft in future conflicts as essentially only to drop bombs on the enemy. Other types of aircraft, such as pursuits (which we now call "fighters"), came out a distant second in procurement, development and operational funding. However, when the Air Corps began to learn about significant advances in aircraft performance in nations such as Germany and Italy that could potentially be future adversaries, they finally woke up to global military reality. They realized that America, despite having an isolationist policy and a feeling of protection from the conflicts in Europe and Asia afforded by two oceans, needed interceptor aircraft to counter the burgeoning foreign bomber threat.

Although it focused on bombers, the Air Corps had for years shown a low-level interest in small, single-engine aircraft. One of the results of that interest was the P-36 *Hawk*. Developed entirely as a private venture with company funds by the St. Louis Airplane Division of the Curtiss-Wright Corporation (formed in 1929 with the merger of Curtiss Aeroplane & Motor Company, Ltd., and Wright Aeronautical Corporation), the P-36 first flew in May 1935. The all-metal *Hawk* prototype, fitted with a nine-cylinder Wright R-1820-39 *Cyclone* radial engine, lost to the Seversky Aircraft Corporation P-35 in an April 1936 Air Corps fly-off competition for a new pursuit plane. Worried that Seversky would not be able to deliver the aircraft on time, the service encouraged Curtiss to propose a backup for the Seversky design. The new Y1P-36, with a 14-cylinder Pratt and Whitney R-1830-13 *Twin Wasp* radial engine, was just the ticket, and the Air Corps ordered 210 of them (far more than the 77-plane P-35 order) under the designation P-36A.



▲ The strong family resemblance between Curtiss' radial-engined P-36 Hawk and the far-better-known P-40 Warhawk is apparent in this side view of a P-36C.

The airplane later known as the *Warhawk* resulted from two main factors—the Air Corps' desire to standardize on the Allison V-1710 engine, and its growing concern that deteriorating situations in Europe and the Far East would ultimately involve America in a global conflict. The 1,150-horsepower Allison engine, a liquid-cooled V-12 with an integral supercharger, had a lower frontal area (hence less drag) and better specific fuel consumption than a radial engine of the same power, even though the liquid cooling system added considerable complexity and was more vulnerable to combat damage. In July 1937, the Air Corps directed Curtiss to graft this engine onto the tenth P-36A on the production line. The modified aircraft, designated the XP-40, flew for the first time on October 14, 1938. Its performance was quite impressive for the time, especially compared to other American pursuit planes, which had lagged behind those of other nations. With a top speed of more than 340 miles per hour at 12,000 feet, the



▲ The XP-40 was the 10th production P-36A Hawk airframe fitted with a liquid-cooled, supercharged Allison V-1710 V-12 engine in place of its original air-cooled *Twin Wasp* radial.

XP-40 was faster than the British Hawker *Hurricane* but slower than the Supermarine *Spitfire* and the *Luftwaffe's* Messerschmitt Bf.109E *Emil*.

The Air Corps finally realized that its obsolete forces would be outclassed and outgunned by the enemy if America went to war, so, on January 25, 1939, the service issued a request for proposals for a new pursuit-type aircraft. Curtiss responded by offering four single-engine designs—the XP-40 (which had a big advantage by already being in flight test), the H75R, the XP-37 and the XP-42. The Lockheed Corporation proposed the two-engine XP-38, Bell Aircraft Corporation came in with an upgraded XP-39, and Seversky proposed the XP-41 and XP-43. The Air Corps chose the XP-40 as the winner, based not on its performance (which was not the best of the bunch),



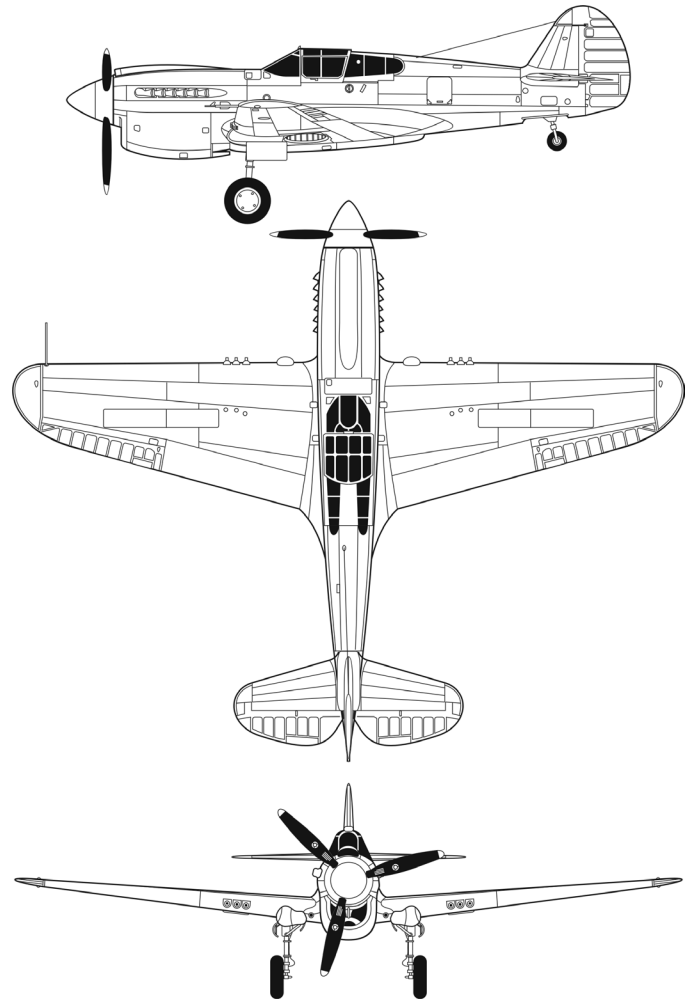
▲ Starting with the P-40D, the Warhawk's armament was six hard-hitting .50-calibre Browning machine guns, three in each wing. Deadly to the enemy, it also made for an impressive display on the firing line as the guns were harmonized, i.e., set so that their streams of fire converged at a certain range.

Curtiss P-40E Warhawk General Characteristics	
Powerplant	1,150-horsepower liquid-cooled Allison V-1710-39 V-12
Cruise Speed	235 miles per hour
Maximum Speed	362 miles per hour
Service Ceiling	~ 29,000 feet
Length	31 feet 2 inches
Wingspan	37 feet 3½ inches
Range	~ 650 miles
Weight (empty)	6,350 pounds
Weight (maximum)	9,200 pounds

but because it was less costly and could be in full production up to a year earlier than the competing designs. On April 26, 1939, the Air Corps contracted with Curtiss for 524 P-40s in a contract valued at \$13,000,000. It was the largest aircraft procurement ever up to that time. No one knew it then, of course, but by the time P-40 production ended in November 1944, a total of 13,738 had been built, in a bewildering number of variations, and they had served in the air forces of 28 nations, including those of nearly all of the World War II Allies.

Called *Tomahawk*, *Kittyhawk* or *Warhawk* depending on the model and user, the “modern” P-40 was a vital part of America's aerial arsenal in the early days of World War II. In fact, P-40s and Bell P-39 *Aircobras* made up more than half of the Air Corps' fighter strength until July 1943. The *Warhawk's* importance in the dark period after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, cannot be overestimated. Although its performance didn't match that of its adversaries, it was sturdy, adaptable, easy to maintain, could absorb considerable combat damage, and, most importantly, it was *available*.

On the other hand, it was already obsolete by European standards even before the prototype flew. While it undeniably was slower, less maneuverable and had a poorer rate-of-climb than other contemporary fighters—problems that were the subject of a Congressional investigation chaired by then-Senator Harry S Truman of Missouri—the *Warhawk* nevertheless acquitted itself well in the Pacific in the



hands of skilled, well-trained pilots. It helped slow down Japanese advances for a year until better aircraft became available in quantity. As a tribute to its utility, if not its performance, the P-40 was produced in greater numbers than all but two other U.S. World War II fighters, Republic's P-47 *Thunderbolt* and North American's P-51 *Mustang*. At peak production rate, some 45,000 workers at three Curtiss plants in St. Louis, Missouri, Buffalo, New York, and Columbus, Ohio, turned out 60 P-40s *per day*.

When America entered the War, the Air Corps had 913 aircraft, of which 636 were pursuits, deployed outside of the 48 States, mainly in the Philippines, Hawaii and the Caribbean. The 15th and 18th Pursuit Groups of the 14th Pursuit Wing, at

Featured Aircraft (Continued on page 4)

Featured Aircraft (Continued from page 3)

Wheeler Field on Oahu, had 87 P-40Bs and 12 P-40Cs, along with 53 obsolete P-26s and P-36As. When bombs started falling on the field at 8:00 on that infamous Sunday morning, three 46th Pursuit Squadron P-36As managed to take off through the fire and smoke. They jumped a flight of Japanese Aichi *Val* dive bombers, shooting down three for a loss of one of their own. The 47th Pursuit Squadron, which had moved to an airfield at Haleiwa for gunnery practice a few days earlier and thus escaped the attack, got six P-40Bs into the air at 9:00. They downed seven bombers at the cost of one fatality—a pilot named Lt. John L. Dains, who was shot down in the first “friendly fire” incident of the war.

While the dogfights over Hawaii—and, only four hours later, those over the Philippines during the near-simultaneous Japanese attack there—marked the *Warhawk*'s combat debut in American service, the aircraft became most famous and widely known around the world for the bold, daring missions in the CBI (China-Burma-India) theatre flown by the *Flying Tigers* in their shark-mouthed P-40s.



▲ P-40s under construction stretch as far as the eye can see at the Curtiss plant in Buffalo, New York. Note the woman working in the foreground, a lasting legacy of America's civilian mobilization to forge the weapons that assured victory for the Allies. Scenes like this were repeated in aircraft factories from coast to coast during World War II. Consider the difference today, when the entire production run of the B-2 Stealth Bomber was only 21 aircraft.

When America entered the war, hostilities had already been raging in Europe and Asia for years. In 1938, the German *Anschluss* with Austria and the occupation of Czech Sudetenland had brought little objection from other nations. On September 1, 1939, Hitler had invaded Poland in a blatant land grab that he thought the world would ignore, as it had ignored (or tacitly accepted) his unending aggression that, for more than two years, had seen most of Europe fall under Nazi domination. By 1940, Hitler's *blitzkrieg* (lightning war) had conquered, in quick succession, Norway, Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Belgium and France—and the world had barely protested. But this time he miscalculated. Germany's unprovoked invasion of Poland finally got some attention. Two days later, Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand declared war on Germany.

On the other side of the world, Japan and China had a history of conflict dating back to the late 19th Century. On September 18, 1931, Japan had staged the Mukden Incident (dynamiting a railroad track in southern Manchuria) as a pretext for war with China. The next year, Japan invaded Manchuria and set up the puppet state of Manchukuo.

Tensions between the two nations remained high for years. Finally, on July 7, 1937, China's National Revolutionary Army, under Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek, battled Imperial Japanese forces at the Marco Polo Bridge near Beijing, leading to the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War. But Japan had still bigger plans. On September 22, 1940, the Emperor's forces occupied French Indochina as another step on the road to creating the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere, which was to be a self-

sufficient bloc of Asian nations under Japanese control and free of Western influence. Like most such grandiose plans of tyrants throughout history, this one failed, but only after the loss of untold resources and millions of lives.

Well before Pearl Harbor, many Americans admired China's heroic resistance to the seemingly unstoppable Japanese armies. One particular American, a retired Air Corps Captain named Claire L. Chennault (at the time a special advisor to Chiang) admired the Chinese resistance so much that he decided to join the battle. He conceived the idea of an “international” air force to help defend China against the invaders. With Washington's backing, Chennault recruited 100 volunteer pilots and 200 ground crewmen as the nucleus of the American Volunteer Group (AVG). Although he supposedly recruited only non-military personnel, there was a bit of subterfuge going on. Many volunteers were actually active-duty military personnel who first had to transfer into the Reserve in order to be eligible to serve in the AVG.

The AVG set up operations at a British training base in Burma in July 1941. By September, the group had received 98 *Tomahawk IIBs* (as the British called their P-40Cs) diverted from a Royal Air Force (RAF) order. It is not clear exactly when the famous “shark-mouth” markings first adorned the radiator air scoops of the AVG's P-40s. What is clear is that the AVG was not the first to use them. The RAF's 112 Squadron used similar markings, but with smaller teeth, on their *Tomahawks* in Libya in the spring of 1941. And the RAF apparently got the idea from the Germans. There are reportedly photographs of twin-engine Messerschmitt Bf.110s of II. Gruppe (Group) of Zerstörergeschwader (Destroyer Squadron) 76 having such markings during the Scandinavian campaign.

The AVG first saw combat over China's Yunnan Province on December 20, 1941, when its P-40s shot down nine of 10 Japanese bombers attacking Kunming, the China end of the famed Burma Road. In the next 11 days, the AVG tallied 75 Japanese aircraft destroyed, with the loss of two of their own pilots and six aircraft.



▲ This photograph shows the genuine “Flying Tiger” paint scheme on an AVG P-40E somewhere in the CBI Theatre. The second “eye” right on the edge of the shark mouth actually appears to be a bullet hole.

A mere seven months later, the AVG disbanded. But in that short time it had become a true aviation legend.

P-40s of the AVG, and RAF Hawker Hurricanes and American-built Brewster Buffalos, fought side-by-side to defend Rangoon until late February 1942, when Japanese ground forces overran the Burmese capital and pushed the Allies deep into Burma and eventually into western China. The British barely broke even in their dogfights with the Japanese, while AVG pilots had a “kill ratio” of about 15-to-1. It was all a matter of tactics. The British continued to use tactics that had been successful against the Germans and Italians in Europe and Africa, but that did not work against the Japanese. AVG pilots adapted to the situation and to the enemy, and developed new, highly effective tactics. Their aggressive style of combat spread throughout the U.S. Army and Navy within the first year of the War.



▲ Since each was painted individually, there was a lot of variation in the “shark mouth” markings among the AVG’s aircraft, as the first two ships in this photo clearly show.

Air Corps brass had taken notice of the AVG’s superior performance in its early operations, even with outdated aircraft, and wisely decided to send some improved, newer-model P-40s into the theatre. In January 1942, the service shipped 50 brand-new crated P-40Es across the Atlantic to West Africa (avoiding the more-hazardous Pacific crossing), where they were put together and then ferried via India to Chinese bases. The AVG received its first P-40E at the end of April; other batches arrived in May and June. By then, the AVG’s days as a quasi-independent air force were numbered—it was even then being absorbed into the 23rd Fighter Group of the U.S. 14th Air Force, a transfer that consummated at midnight on July 4, 1942.

Chennault himself later summed up the deeds of the AVG: “The group that the military experts predicted would not last three weeks in combat had fought for seven months over Burma, China, Thailand and French Indo-China, destroying 299 Japanese planes and with another 153 probably destroyed. All of that with a loss of 12 P-40s in combat and 61 on the ground, including 22 [intentionally, in retreat] burned at Loi-Wing. Four pilots were killed in aerial combat, six by anti-aircraft fire, three on the ground in enemy bombings, ten in flying accidents, and three were taken prisoner. Although the Japanese promised in radio broadcasts to shoot AVG prisoners as bandits, they treated our three prisoners as well as British and American POWs, likely an indication of the enemy’s genuine respect for our organization.

The flashing sharks teeth of our P-40s and our trademark as Flying Tigers were world famous.”

War Eagles Air Museum’s P-40E left the Curtiss production line in late 1941 and, on December 3, she began serving with the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) as a *Kittyhawk Mk.Ia*. During the War, she flew coastal patrols

off the coast of British Columbia, Canada, and may have had a spell of duty in the Alaska Territory’s Aleutian Islands. A few bullet holes patched by distinctive military methods were discovered years later, suggesting combat damage at some point in her RCAF career. In 1947, the RCAF put her up for sale at Patricia Bay Air Base on Vancouver Island. Fred Dyson bought her for \$50 on September 13, 1947, and barged her to Boeing Field in Seattle, Washington, where she received her civilian registration number N1207V. In the next decade, the peripatetic P-40 had at least six owners, and she turned up at various locations across the country, including New York, Colorado, Connecticut, Oklahoma, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Minnesota. On January 31, 1958, Frank G. Tallman, then of Glenview, Illinois, bought her. This was about a year after Walter H. Erickson, of Minneapolis, Minnesota, had restored her to flying condition. Tallman, an ex-television network executive who had decided to pursue a career in his first love, aviation, was amassing a large collection of classic aircraft at the time. He soon moved to Flabob Airport, near Riverside, California, 30 miles east of Los Angeles, and set up Tallman Aviation with his collection of 16 flyable vintage aircraft, including P-40E N1207V. In December 1961, Tallman Aviation merged with Paul Mantz Air Services, a nearby company specializing in movie and television stunt flying, to form Tallmantz Aviation. The company soon became famous as the go-to outfit for producers of aviation films. The rest, as they say, is history.

To find out more about the career of one of the finest P-40s in existence today, including her appearance in the 1970 film *Tora! Tora! Tora!*, be sure to read the following article by Eric Mingledorff, who owned the airplane before Museum founder John MacGuire acquired her. ☛

Plane Talk on the Web

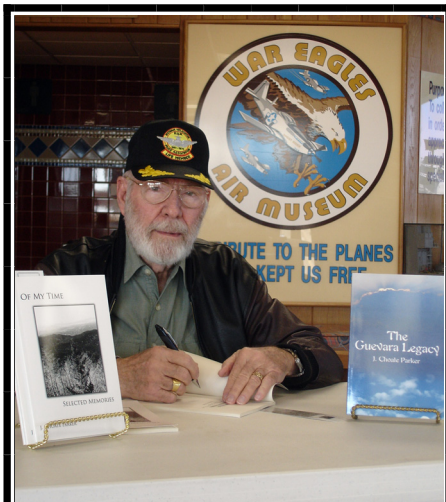
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rchives of *Plane Talk* from the current issue back to the first quarter of 2003 are now available in full color on our website.

The Sweetest Airplane I Ever Flew...

Warhawk Memories by Eric Mingledorff

In 1978, I bought the Curtiss P-40E, at that time registered N1207V, that later ended up at the War Eagles Air Museum. I had first seen the airplane in California when I was visiting P-40 restorer John Paul. Dick Woodson, of Livermore, California, was her owner at the time. Although she was not in flying condition when I first saw her, she had quite a claim to aerial fame as a “movie star.”



Readers who have enjoyed the *Tailspins with Parker* columns in *Plane Talk* will be interested to know that Jim Parker has published his second book. Following up on *The Guevara Legacy*, his fast-paced novel about nuclear terrorism, Jim’s new book, *Of My Time: Selected Memories*, is more of an autobiography. It includes stories, essays, poetry and even an original song. You can buy plain or autographed copies of his books in the Museum Shop.

Check out Jim’s blog at:

<http://TailspinsWithParker.blogspot.com> for his entertaining insights on life, love, friendship, politics and aviation. Look for more of his articles in future issues of *Plane Talk*. ☺

Shipped to Hawaii on an aircraft carrier, she was one of two vintage P-40s used there in the 1970 film *Tora! Tora! Tora!*, about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. When the two Army P-40s take off in the film, you can see that one of the aircraft has part of its rear canopy painted over. It had been converted to a two-seater by removing the rear fuselage fuel tank, stripping out the sheet metal skin under the Plexiglas panels behind the cockpit and bolting in a seat. N1207V was a single-seater, and looked a lot better, so she got the best close-up shots. The movie is a great place to hear the unforgettable sounds of those magnificent Allison engines in full roar.

After I bought N1207V, I spent two busy weeks in a T-hangar at Livermore Airport and completely dismantled her—propeller, engine, wings, tail and everything in between. I could literally start at the firewall and crawl aft to the main fuel tank area—admittedly it was only a few feet, but it did prove that I *completely* gutted the airplane. John Paul, who I had competed with to buy the airplane, turned right around after losing his purchase bid and graciously helped me out. He called N1207V “probably the best-flying P-40 in existence.” His expert eye told him that her cowlings, wings and fairings were the original assembly line parts. “The airplane flew right,” he said admiringly, “always in the groove, in balance.”

To digress: if you ever see a P-40 marked “SU E” on the fuselage, you may have the opportunity to meet John Paul. He is without doubt the most knowledgeable expert in the world about the P-40, and today he is President of the Warhawk Air Museum in Yampa, Idaho. When I first met his wife Sue, I fell in love for the second time in my life. Sue is a lovely, intelligent woman. As the folks in Louisiana say, ol’ John “married up.” I still suspect that the only reason he helped me

with my “new” airplane was because Sue made him. Anyway, he came by the hangar regularly, and step-by-step he showed me how to disassemble a P-40.

With the propeller, engine and “tail feathers” off, we locked the tailwheel down and plugged its hydraulic lines. We removed all the fairings and cowling pieces, and dropped the fuel tanks down through the bottom of the wing. Hoisting the airplane clear of the hangar floor with a sling, we manually retracted the landing gear and plugged the lines to make sure it stayed up. We put stacks of old, worn-out rubber tires under the wing on each side, with higher stacks nearer the wingtips to handle the dihedral. Carefully and slowly lowering the bird until it rested on the tire stacks, we removed the bolts that held the fuselage and wing together. We rolled the detached fuselage forward and placed it on sawhorses outside the hangar. This was a temporary expedient until we got a welder in to build a steel dolly for it. Once we secured it on its new dolly, we could roll the fuselage around to wherever we wanted it like a toy. We unbolted and separated the wing into its left and right panels, and then the major parts of N1207V were ready to be loaded on a flatbed trailer for shipment.

But there was still more work to do. We wrapped the propeller blades individually and packed them in wooden crates. The tail surfaces got the same treatment. We had a genuine Allison crate for the engine. The shipping company, J.H. Rose



▲ With a temporary steel dolly replacing its main landing gear, the P-40’s fuselage could easily be rolled around like a big toy.

Membership Application War Eagles Air Museum

War Eagles Air Museum memberships are available in six categories. All memberships include the following privileges:

- ➔ Free admission to the Museum and all exhibits.
- ➔ Free admission to all special events.
- ➔ 10% general admission discounts for all guests of a current Member.
- ➔ 10% discount on all Member purchases in the Gift Shop.

To become a Member of the War Eagles Air Museum, please fill in the information requested below and note the category of membership you desire. Mail this form, along with a check payable to “War Eagles Air Museum” for the annual fee shown, to:

War Eagles Air Museum
8012 Airport Road
Santa Teresa, NM 88008

Membership Categories	
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$15
<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$25
<input type="checkbox"/> Participating	\$50
<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting	\$100
<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor	\$1,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Life	\$5,000

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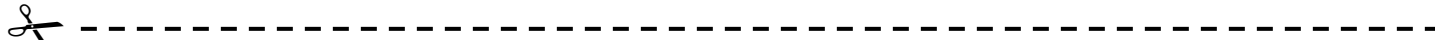
STREET _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

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Will be kept private and used *only* for War Eagles Air Museum mailings.



▲ The P-40's wings are secured on the flatbed trailer at Livermore Airport in 1978.

Truck Lines of Houston, Texas, had dropped off a flatbed trailer and given us a week to load it. John made four A-frames from 2x4s, nailed them to the flatbed deck (two per side) and mounted the wings in them with the tips forward for less air resistance. The fuselage went between the wings on its dolly, and the load was ready for its trip to Louisiana.

I'll never forget what closed this episode in the life of N1207V. Disassembly

and preparation for shipment had taken a solid two weeks. After the J.H. Rose driver picked up the flatbed and I finished cleaning out the T-hangar, I found out that the first flight home was at 9:30 that evening. So I decided to drive across the Bay and revisit San Francisco. I killed a few hours playing tourist at Fisherman's Wharf, then headed for Hayward Airport to await my flight. Fortunately, there was a nice restaurant (*avec* Scotch bar) on the field. I sat there on a barstool nursing a Glenlivet, dead tired beyond words but filled with pride at what we had accomplished. My life was changing quickly, and I knew things would never be the same. At that time in my aviation career, I was an International Aerobatic Club pilot flying Pitts *Specials*. Now I was about to become an airshow pilot flying the big, powerful *Warhawk*. The road ahead was hazy, but I knew it included rebuilding the P-40, learning to fly it and, most important, learning how to do aerobatics “on the deck” without killing myself. I vividly recall a most amazing thing that

happened as I sat there pondering the future. Outside the window near my barstool, a big semi rig pulled up and came to a stop at the light. On the flatbed was N1207V. I watched for a minute, until the driver turned the corner and disappeared in the deepening gloom. Over the years, N1207V gave me several supreme moments. Not all of them were in the air, but all were times when I *really* knew that I was living on the exact cutting edge of my place in this world, exactly where I was supposed to be, and exactly when. That was the first of those moments. ☺

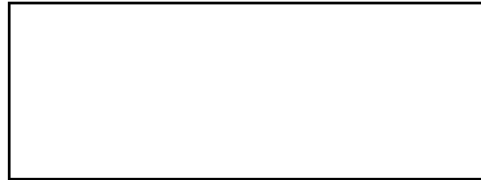
Editor's Note

Check out the next *Plane Talk*, available at the Museum, online and by mail to members on June 30, 2009, for more of Eric Mingleorff's experiences with “the sweetest airplane [he] ever flew.”



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From the Director (Continued from page 2)

Jack that I was turning back to Odessa. Then the engine quit again, and I restarted it again. On final approach to the runway at Odessa's Schlemeyer Field, it quit again, this time for good. Fortunately, I was able to make a decent dead-stick landing. Investigation traced the problem to contaminated fuel. As it turned out, the *Mustangs* also had contaminated fuel, but it wasn't as bad, so John and Jack made it safely back to El Paso.

During the 1990's (again, when insurance costs were lower), the Museum held "mini air shows" with some of our warbirds on the first Saturday of every month, weather permitting. We usually ended each show with a crowd-pleasing, low-altitude, high-speed pass down the runway, followed by a sharp break to landing. One Saturday, as I pulled *Hold-in' My Own* into about a four-G turn for the break, the seat stop pin failed and the seat fell to its lowest position—about a foot below where it had been. All of a

sudden, I couldn't see *anything* ahead, and very little to the sides. The throttle quadrant was about level with my eyes, and the control stick was up around my chin. I had to feel my way to the ground by looking out to the sides. By pure luck, I made one of my best landings ever, and came away from the experience with a new-found appreciation for Charles Lindbergh's airmanship in being able to fly the *Spirit of St. Louis* with NO forward visibility—a huge fuel tank filled all of the space in front of his cockpit.

The P-40's first Amigo Airshow appearance in 1985 was almost its last. We planned to leave John MacGuire's ranch in Fort Hancock, Texas, and fly to El Paso in a formation of five—John and Jack in two P-51 *Mustangs*, Jim Nugent in the T-28 *Trojan*, Rob Satterfield in the F4U-4 *Corsair* and me in the P-40 *Warhawk*. As the "new kid on the block," I had the honor of taking off first. I taxied to the runway, making wide S-turns for visibility because the P-40's long nose blocks the view forward when the air-

plane is on the ground. Lining up on the runway, I advanced the throttle smartly. Too smartly, as it turned out, and I learned a quick lesson about "P-factor." The torque of the Allison engine forced the nose to the left. Before I knew what was happening, the P-40 headed off the runway and into the desert. The main gear hit a pile of dirt pile and the plane bounced into the air. I went to full combat power and managed to become airborne. Rob radioed dryly, "If you're gonna fly, raise the gear." "I don't know if she's gonna fly," I responded. But she did, and the rest of the flight was uneventful, except for my shaking knees.

I hope you've enjoyed these "old pilot's tales," and that they added a little personal touch to the story of this issue's Featured Aircraft. Our beautiful P-40E, with its distinctive shark-mouth paint job, has become a symbol of War Eagles Air Museum, and I'll never forget my experiences flying her.

Skip Trammell ✪