


# WARBIRD



DIGEST

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## SuperStangs Part I

THE FIGHTER  
FACTORY'S  
NEW HOME

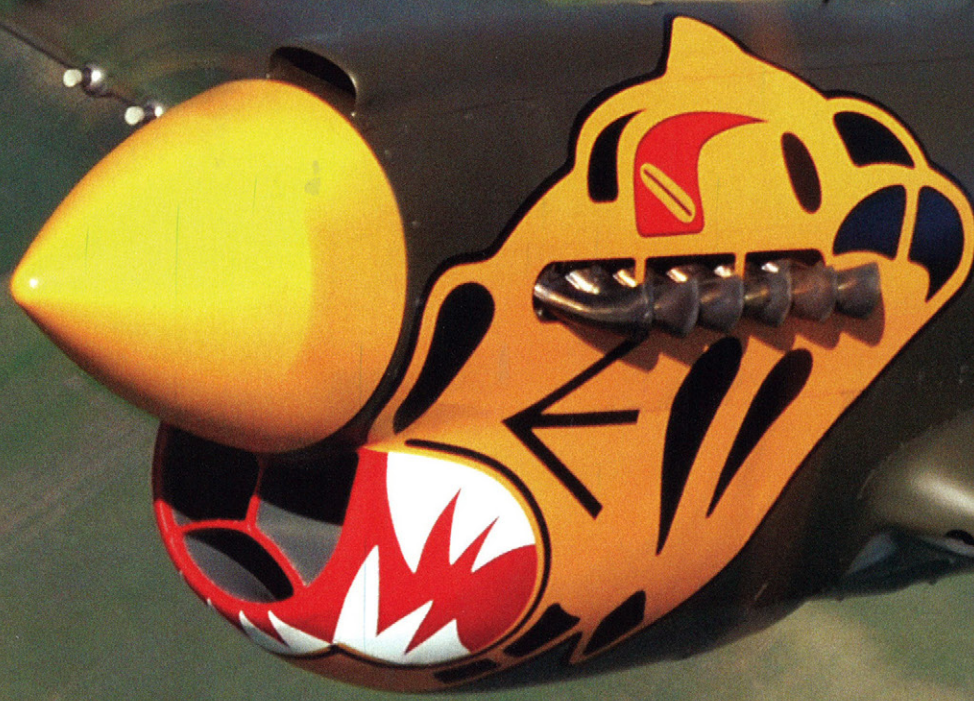
## Aleutian TIGER!

Warhawks Inc.'s  
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## Warhawks Inc.'s Fabulous P-40 Restoration

The northern part of the United States has started to gain a reputation as a hot bed of warbird restoration activity. For many years two small towns in North Dakota, Kindred and Wahpeton, have been synonymous with quality P-51 Mustang restorations by Odegaard Aviation and Tri-State Aviation respectively. Now the small town of Granite Falls, Minnesota, within a stone's throw of North Dakota, can boast of the finest in P-40 Warhawk restorations. Ron Fagen's Warhawks Inc. has recently completed the first of a series of Curtiss P-40 restorations that are sure to turn heads. The folks at Warhawks Inc. were kind enough to allow Warbird Digest to visit and see their impressive new operation while **Greg Morehead** photographed their stunning first project.





▲ Three generations of aviation enthusiasts. Ron Fagen with his father Ray Fagen and grandson Ethan Fagen.

◀ The team responsible for the restoration. (left) Jason Dunn Fagen Inc. corporate mechanic, (middle) Erik Hokuf with Sparky (right) Brandon Deuel, Warhawks Inc. machinist.





▲ (top) As evidenced by these recovery photographs, the P-40K was rather heavily vandalized over the nearly fifty years since its forced landing. The incredible efforts necessary to return the Warhawk to the air are clear.

▲ (middle) The completed fuselage and wing section are mated together on the ramp at Granite Falls.

Ron Fagen didn't set out to own an operation specializing in Curtiss fighters; in fact, he had long had his eyes set on fighters from other manufacturers altogether. "Shortly after I got married in the mid-seventies, I decided I wanted to own a Mustang or a Corsair. Well, I gathered up a couple of buddies of mine and we decided to head for Central America to buy one. In my naiveté, I planned to fly down there, locate one, jump in it and fly it home. A couple of us jumped in a Mooney and headed for El Salvador. We missed the Corsairs by just a few months, so we headed on over to Guatemala City to look for P-51s. I found one chained to a tree that Guatemalan military personnel were running up every once in a while. Since I was in the construction business, I offered to build the local commander a hangar in exchange for the airplane, but he declined since they wanted to keep the airplane as a memorial. So we returned empty-handed. In retrospect it was probably a good thing because I would have likely killed myself trying to fly it home. I wouldn't have been the first to do so."

With his hopes of buying a cheap warbird fighter dashed, Fagen entered into the world of competition aerobatics and for the next ten years spent his time building his business and honing his flying skills. In 1985 Fagen stopped his participation in competition aerobatics, but continued to fly while he focused on his business. Over the years his company became the world leader in the development and construction of ethanol plants. While preoccupied with other matters, the desire for a warbird was still resident in Fagen. In the early nineties he decided to visit Stallion 51 for some Mustang training. "I went down to see Lee Lauderback to fly the Mustang. I had a lot of Pitts time, but the Mustang was a different animal. Anyone who thinks they can just jump from a Pitts into a Mustang without the proper training is asking for trouble. My time at Stallion 51 reinforced that I would have had a difficult time had I tried to bring home a fighter from Central American."

When Fagen came home from flying 'Crazy Horse' in Florida, he was even more passionate about warbirds and in particular the P-51. "I came home, and I really wanted a Mustang, but I couldn't afford one at the time. Shortly after I got back, John Sandberg was killed over in Pierre, South Dakota in his air racer, Tsunami. I was aware of his Mustang, 'Platinum Plus' which had been totally rebuilt, and I decided to see if the family was going to sell it. After a bit I called Sharon Sandberg and asked if they were interested in selling the airplane. They told me they thought they would like to keep it. Some period of time went by and they called me back and said they were considering selling it. I went to Minneapolis and met with Sharon and Sam Torvik and we worked out a deal. At the time the airplane had a real 'hot' racing engine in it and they wanted to keep it, so they offered to overhaul a brand new Merlin that was still in the shipping crate. I agreed and returned home to visit with my banker. He was agreeable to loaning me the money, so I owned a Mustang. A few months later the engine was done and we went up to Salt Lake City where the airplane had been sitting in Gary Levitz' hangar. We swapped the engine and then Skip



Holm came in to test fly it and deliver it to Granite Falls. When Skip brought it to Granite Falls he beat up our little grass strip pretty good and then landed. Torvik convinced him to take me around the patch for my first flight in my own Mustang. After they left I went out and flew it. It had been a bit since I had been to Stallion so I went over the books pretty well, but it was a dream come true."

With the long sought after Mustang in the fold, Fagen thought he was finished buying warbirds for a while. "On Thanksgiving I was at my dad's house reading Trade-A-Plane when I stumbled across an advertisement for a P-40E for an unbelievable price. Not only was the price unbelievable, but it was not too far from me in Carmen, Manitoba. We quickly ate our Thanksgiving meal and my father and I jumped in my Bonanza and headed up there. Now, I had never seen a P-40 before, but I just knew this had to be a good deal. We met Bob Diemert there at his farm/airport and looked over the P-40. In the advertisement he claimed it was a P-40E but when we got there he told us it was a P-40F, because it was a Merlin engine model. Now remember, I didn't know much about P-40s, but it sure looked like it was all there. So I made the deal, for just a little shy of \$300,000. Diemert told me it would take some time to get all the paperwork sorted out with the Canadian authorities, and I flew home thinking I had just made the deal of the century. A couple of days later I was talking to Gerry Beck and I mentioned this P-40. He stopped me and said, 'You didn't buy that, did you?' I told him I had, and



(top & bottom) The P-40K in the clean and well-organized hangar where Hokuf performed the restoration. Warhawks Inc. has now moved into more spacious and well equipped facilities and this hangar will become the sheet metal shop for the company.







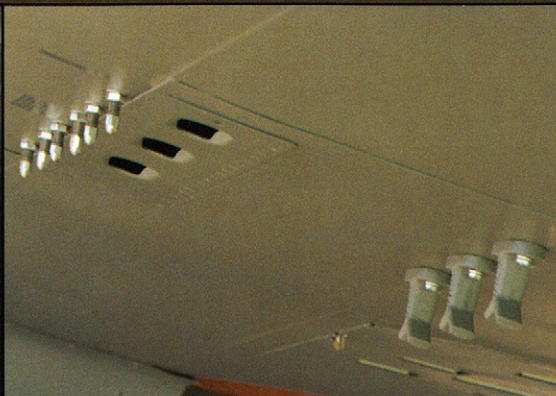
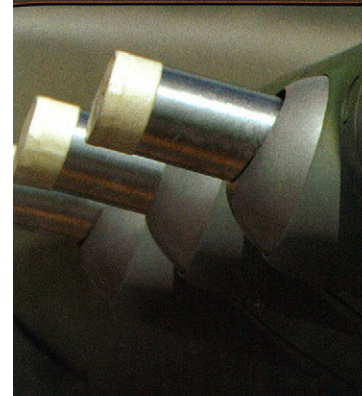
he told me that everyone, including himself, had been up there looking at this airplane chasing the elusive 'deal of the century' P-40, but that it really wasn't a true P-40. Now I was getting a little nervous, so I gathered up as much data on the P-40 as I could and went up and looked at it again. It had a real P-40 wing. It had been spliced in a couple of places, but it was the right dimensions and had the right profile. The fuselage was pretty cobbled up and it had a T-6 Texan tail. The engine, of course, was supposed to be an Allison, as it really was an E-model. After looking it over, I began to feel a little bit better. After all, a considerable amount of the airplane was real P-40. I had already paid for the airplane, so I was committed and I was pleased to find that I hadn't done too badly.

Fagen sent the fuselage to Tom Wilson of Griffin, Georgia, who at the time was heavily engaged in the rebuild of P-40 airframes. When the fuselage was complete, it was mated back to the existing wing. The P-40E, actually a RCAF Kittyhawk I, AK753 N4420K was painted as the mount of ace Ray Calloway as 'Shirley III.' Calloway was a Granite Falls hero having gone off to the CBI to join Claire Chennault's Chinese-American Composite Wing and returned a 6.5 victory ace.

While Fagen was struggling to straighten out the bugs in AK753 several states away in Tipton, Kansas, Ken Hake was quietly working on another P-40 project. One of two P-40s he acquired from Russia in 1991, USAAF Serial No. 42-10256 was a Lend Lease aircraft that made its way to the Soviet Union in November 1942, most likely by flying through Canada, across the Aleutian Islands, through Siberia to the western front. In September 1943 the pilot, JLt I.I. Mikhajlov became disorientated after combat with four Messerschmitts of JG 5 and crashed in Murmansk on the Kola Peninsula, near Scandinavia. Walter Zaag of Switzerland





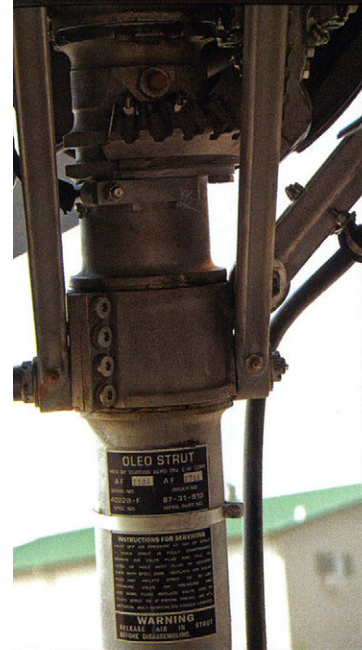
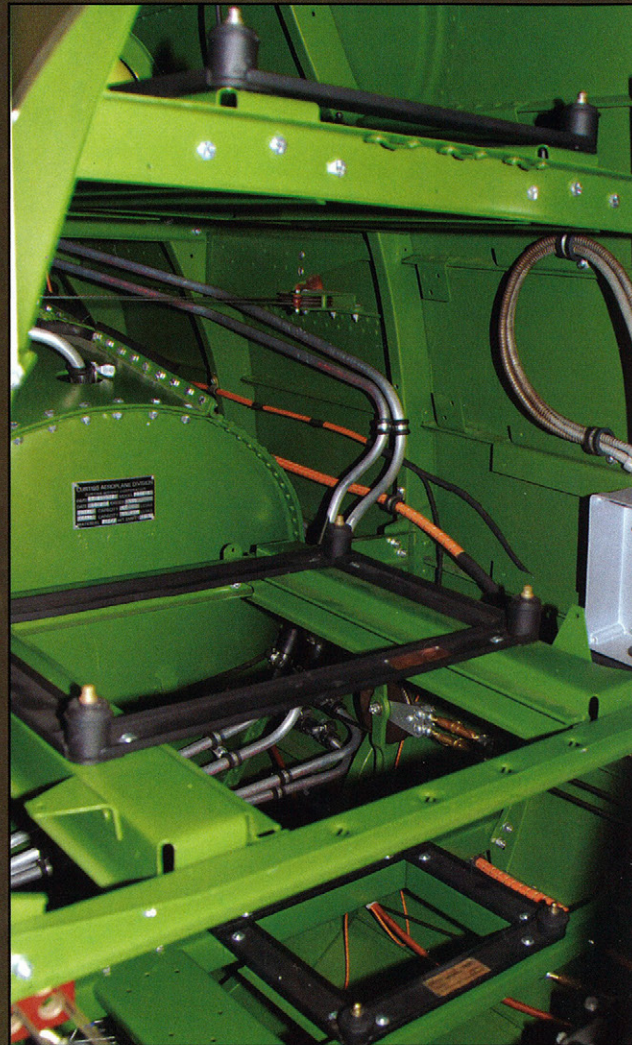


▲ (top left) The Curtiss specifications call for the gun barrels to be sealed with Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing scotch-type tape. Minnesota Mining is now known as 3M.

▲ (top middle) The P-40K left the factory with bomb racks on the outer wing panels which were designed to carry small anti-personnel or fragmentation bombs. This is likely the first restoration to have this detail added.

◆ The landing gear of the P-40 was cadmium plated, not painted.

► The interior of the aft fuselage and the radio racks. The original radios have been obtained, but had not yet been installed when Warbird Digest visited. The zinc chromate color is the original shade per the Berryloid specifications.



The factory drawings call for the flap bays to be left zinc chromate.



The highly detailed gun bays of the P-40. Over 150 individual components were required for each bay.