



# Plane Talk

Volume 17, Number 1

## The Newsletter of the War Eagles Air Museum

### Editorial

Well, the Centennial of Flight Anniversary year is history. Thanks to the support, interest, enthusiasm and hard work of an incredible number of participants, sponsors and volunteers, War Eagles Air Museum and the Doña Ana County Airport at Santa Teresa celebrated the occasion in style. We hope many of you were able to attend some of the events, which were intended to offer “something for everyone”—the First Flight Stamp Unveiling Ceremony, the Centennial of Flight Fly-In, the Classic Aviation Film Series, the Chili Cook-off and the flight of the world’s oldest airworthy Piper J-3 *Cub* one hundred years to the minute after Orville Wright’s pioneering accomplishment.

Now that we have momentum built up, we do not plan to bring our commemorative activities to a halt. We saw a fairly high level of interest among local people, community organizations and media in the events that we held last year. In the future, we intend to pick two or three important historical aviation milestones every year—for example, the first flight of a noteworthy aircraft, the anniversary of a key aerial battle or the achievement of a new aeronautical record—and celebrate it by means of media coverage, special exhibits, presentations or other events. We hope to do our part to help maintain the newly burgeoning public interest in aviation that the Centennial generated.

Watch for announcements of upcoming activities. It should be fun! ☺



▲ The latest War Eagles Air Museum aircraft acquisition, a beautiful 1943 Stearman primary trainer, arrives on January 8, 2004.

### Featured Aircraft

By the late 1930s, the U.S. Army Air Corps had a very active pilot training program, largely due to the vision and commitment of some farsighted officers who foresaw the need for a large, capable aerial combat force as the world lurched along the path to global war. Pilot candidates who passed the Air Corps’ physical and aptitude exams entered a three-phase program that taught them how to fly and fight. First, students learned their initial flying skills, including solo flight, in ten weeks of instruction in a Primary Trainer at either Randolph

*Featured Aircraft (Continued on Page 2)*

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## From The Director

As we reflect back on last year's celebration of the Centennial of Flight, one thing stands out very clearly—it was a tremendous team effort. Even though the planning process for the anniversary events got off to a late start, everyone involved jumped in enthusiastically and "made it happen." What started as chaos slowly took form as the days and weeks passed. In the end, each event went smoothly thanks to the hard work and dedication of the team members. No one other than those directly involved saw the inevitable small glitches. We learned important lessons during each event that helped make the next one better. One lesson we learned each and every time—don't underestimate how many people will attend. There was enormous public interest in what we did at Doña Ana County Airport and elsewhere for the Centennial of Flight.

Any attempt to acknowledge individually the hundreds of people who participated in the Centennial of Flight anniversary events would surely leave someone out unintentionally. Instead, let me just say "Thank you" to all who played a part. I hope you had fun. As you'll read elsewhere in this newsletter, we plan to continue to celebrate aviation milestones in the coming years. We believe the partnerships that we formed within the last year will serve us all well in the future as we work to honor the men, women and machines that have kept our country free. We look forward to working with you again soon.

Skip Trammell ☼

### Plane Talk

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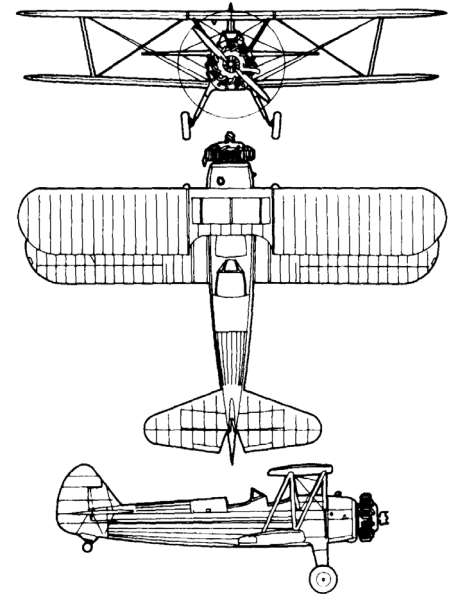
### Featured Aircraft (Continued from page 1)

Field or Brooks Field, near San Antonio, Texas. Then they went on to Basic Flight Training, which, in another ten weeks, gained them experience in heavier, more powerful, more complicated aircraft. Finally, those students on the fighter-pilot track took another ten-week course in an Advanced Trainer at Kelly Field, also near San Antonio. Thus, by the time student pilots earned their wings, they had trained in three different types of aircraft.

For many years, the War Eagles Air Museum's World-War-II era training aircraft collection comprised a Vultee BT-13B *Valiant* Basic Trainer and a North American AT-6 *Texan* Advanced Trainer. But an example of the type of aircraft in which nearly all U.S. military pilots got their first taste of flight was missing. On January 8, 2004, the Museum filled in that "missing link" with the acquisition of a 1943 Boeing/Stearman PT-17 Primary Trainer.

Arguably the most well-known biplane in aviation history, the original design of what became the PT-17 was a product of the Stearman Aircraft Company of Wichita, Kansas. Founded in 1926 by former architect Lloyd Stearman, the company's small but dedicated workforce excelled in building light aircraft. Some of them were so well-designed that they remained unchanged for years.

Stearman later became the Stearman Division of United Aircraft & Transport Corporation (UATC). In those halcyon days of innocence, when the U.S. Government cared little for anti-trust issues, it was common for airframe and engine manufacturers, as well as airline operators, to be part of the same company. UATC also owned Boeing Aircraft Company, Northrop Aircraft Company, Pratt & Whitney Company and United Airlines. This all changed when Congress passed the Air Mail Act of 1934. Triggered by the scandal of the 1930 "Spoils Conference," in which U.S. Postmaster Walter Brown had awarded lucrative airmail contracts noncompetitively to a hand-picked group of large aviation companies, this legislation forcibly broke up these "vertical



holding companies." United Airlines, Northrop, Boeing and P&W all split off from UATC as separate entities on September 28, 1934. At that time, Stearman became a wholly owned subsidiary of Boeing. Later, on April 11, 1938, Stearman became the Stearman Aircraft Division of the Boeing Aircraft Company. Even so, most of the aircraft the company built during this period are universally called "Stearmans."

In 1934, Stearman was working on a biplane called the X-70. Development was well-advanced when Boeing took over. Not about to give up what looked like a

### Featured Aircraft (Continued on page 3)

#### Boeing/Stearman Model 75 (Stearman PT-17) Characteristics

Powerplant	Various
Cruising Speed	110 mph
Maximum Speed	150 mph
Range	500 miles
Service Ceiling	~ 15,000 feet
Weight (empty)	2,100 pounds
Weight (max.)	2,950 pounds
Length	25' 0"
Wingspan	32' 2"

*Featured Aircraft (Continued from page 2)*

promising aircraft, Boeing allowed Stearman to continue work on the project. The prototype had flown for the first time on January 1, 1934. With a 225-horsepower Lycoming R-680-5 radial engine, fabric-covered wooden wings and an exceptionally strong welded-steel-tube fuselage, the renamed Boeing/Stearman Model 75 proved to be rugged, forgiving, reliable and fairly economical. Recognizing that the big two-seater made an excellent primary trainer, even though it was nearly obsolete at the time, the U.S. Army Air Corps ordered a batch, accepting the first production example of what it called the PT-13 *Kaydet* (a name that never really caught on) on December 13, 1934.



▲ *The Stearman's simple front cockpit.*

Over the next several years, Stearmans found wide acceptance by the U.S. military. The total production from 1936 to 1944 was 8,584 aircraft, in all versions, plus the equivalent of 2,000 more in spares. With the outbreak of World War II, the military's needs for pilot training skyrocketed, and the Army and Navy bought thousands of Stearmans on a crash-priority basis. Almost all American pilots got their basic flight training in the venerable biplane. The trainers were also sold to military and civilian



▲ *The Stearman in the South Hangar, resplendent in its authentic pre-War blue-and-yellow color scheme with 13 stripes on the tail. With the Vultee BT-13B Valiant and North American AT-6F Texan, the Stearman nicely completes War Eagles' collection of WWII vintage training aircraft.*

customers in Argentina, Brazil, Canada, China, the Philippines and Venezuela.

Stearmans bore a bewildering number of designations depending on the customer and engine/propeller combination. Engine choices were the original 225-hp Lycoming, a 220-hp Continental R-670-4 or -5, a 225-hp Jacobs R-755, a 300-hp Lycoming R-680-5, -7, -8, -11 or -17, a 450-hp P&W R-985 and a 275-hp Jacobs R-775 (the last three only available post-War). Propeller choices were the standard Sensinech wooden prop, a fixed-pitch Hamilton Standard or a ground-adjustable McCauley steel-blade unit.

The various models of U.S. Army Air Corps Stearmans were designated PT-13, PT-13A, PT-13B, PT-17, PT-18, PT-27 and PT-13D. Navy airplanes were designated N2S-1, -2, -3, -4 and -5. Other than the engines, the major difference between the versions was that the Army planes' tail wheel was fully steerable while the Navy's was locking and fully swiveling.

After World War II, Stearmans became military surplus and the Government offered them for sale at rock-bottom prices. Crop dusting pilots liked their rugged dependability and excellent low-speed handling characteristics, and they became familiar sights as they buzzed over agricultural fields from coast to coast until about the mid-1960s. Airshow performers also took to them in droves, and they flew on the airshow circuit for over 30 years after

the end of the War. For many crop dusting jobs, the fabric fuselage covering was replaced with metal to avoid chemical contamination problems, and the engine of choice was the powerful P&W R-985. The Museum's plane, a former crop duster, is of this configuration. We're waiting to get the complete, detailed history of this aircraft from the seller.

Stop in soon to see this latest addition to War Eagles Air Museum's premier collection of historic aircraft. ☼



▲ *Director Skip Trammell in the Stearman.*

*War Eagles Air Museum*  
**On The Web**

**C**heck War Eagles' website for more information on the Museum's aircraft and automobile collections, special event plans and schedules, "fun and games" and more, as well as downloadable versions of this newsletter in full color. Thanks to Bruce Quackenbush and Joe Jones of Artwork Studios in Denver for designing and maintaining our highly acclaimed website. ☼

## Centennial of Flight Celebration Wrap-up

If you've been following War Eagles Air Museum's activities in honor of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of powered flight, you know that 2003 was crammed with exciting events. The celebrations culminated on December 17. On that day, under beautiful clear skies with no wind and just a slight chill, War Eagles Air Museum's Chief Pilot Jack Bell took to the air in the world's oldest fly-



▲ The event attracted a large audience.

able Piper aircraft, a 1937 J-3 *Cub*. To the delight of an estimated 1,200 spectators, Jack was airborne right on schedule at 8:35AM, exactly one hundred years to the minute after Orville Wright's historic first flight. Taking off from Doña Ana County Airport's taxiway "A" rather than Runway 10/28 in order to be closer to the crowd, Jack circled the field twice and then brought the bright yellow *Cub* in for a perfect landing.



▲ "Ramp Rats" and marshalls, under the able direction of volunteer Frank Harrison, made sure people were safe and aircraft were protected during the big event.



▲ Chief Pilot Jack Bell and the *Cub*.

There was more to the day than just the flight of a historic aircraft. A Wright Brothers essay contest, sponsored by Dr. Joe Nelson and the Experimental Aircraft Association, attracted entries from many local area middle-schoolers. Karissa Feltman, a home-schooled student from Las Cruces, was on hand to read her winning essay "The Significance of the Wright Brothers' Achievement of Powered Flight." Ronald G. Karp, also from Las Cruces, received the prestigious Charles Taylor Master Mechanic Award from the



▲ Morning sunlight on its fabric skin, the world's oldest flyable Piper J-3 *Cub* lifts off, Chief Pilot Jack Bell at the controls.

FAA in honor of his more than 50 years of service as an aviation mechanic. The award is named after the man who built the engine for the first Wright flyer, and without whom Orville and Wilbur would have remained glider pilots. Neighboring Blue Feather Aero Flight School organized a formation flight of five Cessna 152 trainers. The day's events concluded with impressive fly-bys of an Air Force Lockheed F-117A *Nighthawk* stealth fighter and a Luftwaffe Panavia *Tornado*.

Thanks to everyone who contributed their time, resources, energy and enthusiasm to accomplish a meaningful celebration of this historical milestone. ✪



▲ Chief Pilot Jack Bell is taped for television after landing—note that solo flight is from the back seat!



▲ Jack Bell (in white cap), the latest local media darling, is interviewed for television after his triumphant *Cub* flight.



▲ Larry Lupton (l.), of FAA's Albuquerque Flight Standards District Office, presents the Charles Taylor Master Mechanic Award to Ronald G. Karp (r.) of Las Cruces.

Veteran War Eagles volunteer Chuck Crepas shot hundreds of digital photographs of the *Cub* flight event, some of which are used here with permission.

# Historical Perspectives

by Robert Haynes



This first *Historical Perspectives* column of 2004 covers one of the more complicated and mysterious theatres of operations of World War II—the Curtiss P-40 and its involvement in China. A shroud of legend and lore surrounds the use of this aircraft and the work of those who flew and maintained it. One thing that is clear, however, is the need for a re-examination of the U.S. involvement in China during WWII. An examination of this period of U.S.-China relations has convinced me that a better understanding of this era will help resolve various issues in today's relations between these two powers.

When the Japanese invaded China on July 7, 1937, it was the “beginning of the end” of a long series of foreign interventions. Since the time of the Mongols, foreign powers had repeatedly invaded mainland China and carved out their own spheres of influence. In the 1930's, the European nations were still weakened by the global depression and the aftermath of World War I. Japanese rulers, emboldened by their large, modern army and a newly strengthened industrial base able to support the army in the field, saw their chance to carve out their own part of Chi-



▲ A Chinese soldier guards a line of American P-40 fighters, painted with the shark-face emblem of the “Flying Tigers,” at an airfield in China. (NWDNS-208-AA-12X-21)

na. In this, they were very wrong. Eventually, the long-simmering resentment of the Chinese toward foreigners, and the emergence of strong Nationalist and Communist factions, combined to defeat

not only the Japanese but also every other foreign establishment in China.

Although guided by very different philosophies, both the Nationalists and the Communists had the same goal: an independent China, free of foreign influence. Unfortunately, these two groups could not agree to set aside their differences and fight against their common enemy. As a result, thousands of Chinese died fighting each other while thousands more were killed by the invading Japanese Army. Into this divisive, chaotic conflict came the U.S. government, which tried to sabotage Japanese efforts in China while still appearing neutral by supplying arms and equipment to the Nationalist forces under Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek.

The most visible symbol of U.S. support was the formation of the American Volunteer Group in early 1941. Flying Curtiss P-40 aircraft from isolated airstrips throughout China, these pilots had been released from active duty specifically for this assignment. Known as the “Flying Tigers” because of the tiger teeth markings on their fighters, they shot down an incredible total of 286 Japanese aircraft. They did this despite primitive operating conditions at their remote airfields and a crippling lack of spare parts and supplies. Much of this lack was supposedly due to the long supply lines between the U.S. and China. It is currently unknown how much materiel the Nationalists, who the U.S. recognized as the “official” government of China, siphoned off and stockpiled to use against the Communists.

All of Chiang's strategic decisions reflected his struggle against the Communists as well as the war with Japan. If the two Chinese factions had united, they could have fought the Japanese much more effectively. Efforts to broker a truce

between the Nationalists and the Communists continued until as late as 1944. But, other than a shaky cease-fire, these efforts failed because Chiang was unwilling to include the Communists in the government. Nor was the U.S. receptive to officially recognizing the Communist party, especially in light of the Soviet armies' successes in Eastern Europe at that time. Was the U.S. leadership as interested in defeating the Japanese in China as they were in controlling the shape of the post-War Chinese government? If so, they could have applied more pressure to Chiang to force him to unite with the Communists against the Japanese. For instance, stopping the lend-lease shipments would have shown Chiang that the U.S. did care more about defeating Japan than about China's internal squabbles. The current Chinese government still believes that the U.S.'s unflagging support of the Nationalists during WWII was an attempt to stamp out the fledgling Communist movement in China. Right or wrong, this perception is an ongoing source of mistrust between China and the U.S.

During the War, however, these issues did not concern the AVG's dedicated pilots and ground crews who flew, fought and performed maintenance miracles. In July 1942, the AVG became the 23<sup>rd</sup> Fighter Group of the 14<sup>th</sup> Air Force, and continued to operate in China until the end of the war.

War Eagles Air Museum has on display a beautiful P-40E *Warhawk*, complete with the classic “tiger teeth” paint scheme. Seeing this aircraft in person, one can truly appreciate its clean, sleek design. One can also begin to appreciate the efforts that were required to keep this airplane flying in China under extraordinary circumstances. ☺

## Sources

1. *The Time-Life History of WWII*, Eric Sevareid, Time-Life Books, 1989.
2. *Curtiss P-40 in Action*, Ernest McDowell, Squadron/Signal Publications, 1976.
3. *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire*, John Toland, Random House, 1970.



## Cub Flight is Big News in New York

When War Eagles Air Museum's Chief Pilot Jack Bell took the world's oldest flyable Piper J-3 *Cub* aloft at 8:35AM on December 17, 2003 (one hundred years to the minute after Orville Wright's first successful powered flight), the local broadcast media paid attention. El Paso's ABC, NBC and Fox television affiliates all reported on the event on their evening newscasts. With an estimated 1,200 people in attendance, it was a pretty big affair. That's why it's a little hard to understand why, despite several invitations, the local newspaper, the *El Paso Times*, did not print even a single syllable about this historic aviation event.

However, thanks to Doug Baertschi of Queensbury, New York, the flight got a great deal of coverage halfway across the country, in the Glenn Falls, New York *Post-Star*. Here's what reporter Mike Mender had to say about the event in a story published in the December 18 edition of the newspaper:

"Physically, Doug Baertschi may have been in his Queensbury shop Wednesday morning, but mentally, he was 2,000 miles away.

At 8:35AM Mountain Standard Time, 10:35 local time, World War II veteran

Jack Bell taxied down the runway of the War Eagles Air Museum at Santa Teresa, NM—soaring into the sky just in time to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Orville Wright's historic flight at Kitty Hawk, NC.

For Baertschi, the flight brought back a lifetime of memories.

The Piper *Cub* that flew into the New Mexico sky commemorating the birth of modern aviation hung for 29 years from the rafters of the Airport Inn, a popular night spot on Route 9L in Lake George where George's Restaurant now operates.

For three or four years in the early 1980s, Baertschi owned the plane, which is believed to be the oldest flyable Piper J-3 *Cub* in existence. Before that, he worked alongside it—or technically, underneath it—every summer for seven years.

"The owner, Charlie Wade, ran it around the parking lot until it ran out of gas," Baertschi said. "Then he hung it inside the place." Baertschi tended bar there during the summer for seven years in the late '70s, from the time he turned 18. When the club changed hands, the plane was dismantled, and Baertschi bought it in pieces "for a pretty small sum" with the intention of rebuilding it and restoring it. He stored the plane in boxes in a barn in Vermont for awhile, then moved it to an airport in Granville and later to the basement of the Sans Souci Restaurant. But he never got around to fulfilling his dream of rebuilding the Piper. "I didn't have any money," he said. "I had just

gotten out of school and I was broke. That's one of the reasons I sold it." Baertschi eventually sold the plane to Bill Batesole, a man from Vermont who restored the plane to factory new condition. The restored plane flew for the first time after restoration on June 13, 1987. Batesole sold the plane to an air museum in Maine, which subsequently sold it to War Eagles Air Museum in 1991, where it has been on display ever since.

"The last time it flew before (Wednesday) was 10 years ago," said Terry Sunday, director of development for the Museum. "It's the oldest remaining flyable Piper *Cub* and the oldest remaining flyable Piper of any model."

Baertschi said the U.S. government re-appropriated many civilian Piper *Cubs* during World War II and used them for spy planes [*sic*] over Europe. After the war, most were left behind when the troops came home, he said.

"They just rotted in the fields," he said. "But this one was stashed in a barn in Round Lake during the war. So this one survived."

In a way, Wednesday's flight was the fulfillment of a dream for Baertschi, albeit vicariously.

"Obviously it's very exciting," he said. "The best thing that could have happened to that plane is the course that it took." "

Thanks to Doug Baertschi, who contacted the Museum about the *Cub* shortly before its flight, we now know some interesting details about the history of the aircraft that so many people watched fly at Santa Teresa. It is also interesting to note that this very *Cub* may have been the oldest aircraft airborne in the Nation to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary moment. This is an intriguing possibility, since the EAA's highly publicized attempt to fly a multi-million-dollar Wright Flyer replica at Kitty Hawk before 35,000 paying spectators, delayed for two hours due to rain, was a spectacular flop. Those lucky enough to have been at the Doña Ana County Airport on December 17, 2003, may well have witnessed an event of National significance. ☼

## Membership Application War Eagles Air Museum

The War Eagles Air Museum collects, restores and displays historic aircraft, mainly from the World War II and Korean War time periods, to encourage awareness and appreciation of military aviation history through exhibits, educational programs and special events. The Museum is a nonprofit organization as defined by the United States Internal Revenue Code. Operated by staff and volunteers, the Museum is supported by funds obtained from admissions, memberships and contributions. All dues and contributions are tax deductible to the extent permitted by law.

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.

In addition, a Family Membership includes free admission for spouses and all children under 18 living at home.

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

<b>Membership Categories</b>	
<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
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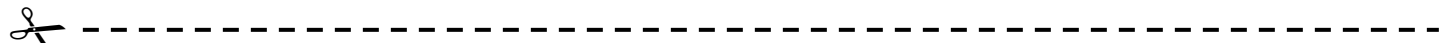
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TELEPHONE (Optional) \_\_\_\_\_

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



**W**ar Eagles Air Museum sincerely thanks the following organizations for their 2003 support of the Corporate Youth Sponsors Program. Because of their support, student groups in the El Paso/Juarez area can learn about the contributions of military aviation to America’s history. For many students, visits to the Museum made possible by donations from these sponsors kindle interest in aviation and related fields as possible career choices. ✪

<b>War Eagles Air Museum Corporate Youth Sponsors</b>			
Bronze	Silver	Gold	Platinum
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## War Eagles Air Museum

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## Project Status

**F**or quite a while, we have been trying to develop a prioritized list of projects for volunteers to look at when they come into the Museum to help them figure out how best to spend their time. The enormous collective effort involved in planning and coordinating our Centennial of Flight activities delayed the completion of that list. Finishing it is an important job for the new year.

In the meantime, indefatigable Museum staff member and all-around aviation enthusiast Rich Rollins has not let the lack of a project list deter him from forging ahead. Putting his training and experience as a professional artist to good use, Rich has big plans for some of the Museum's more "weathered" aircraft. The brutal desert sunshine has taken its toll on the few aircraft displayed outside, fading their paint jobs and making them look pretty sad compared to the majority

of the Museum's pristine aircraft that reside in the relatively protected environment of the main hangar building.

Rich's first job is to re-paint the ex-East German Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-21PFM *Fishbed F* that has been on the ramp and exposed to the elements for several years. Rich and fellow Museum staffers Fernie and Carl are working on this project. Volunteers could help by sanding, masking, painting or documenting the existing placards and markings and preparing replacement stencils. A similar project involves re-painting the Vought A-7E *Corsair II*, which has also suffered from exposure. Volunteer Damon Loveless photographed its markings last year, but more "warm bodies" would be appreciated when Rich begins painting. The Tupolev Tu-2 is also due for a face-lift.

Another project sure to require a lot of volunteer help involves building a full-size diorama simulating a remote airfield in China and featuring the Museum's exquisite Curtiss P-40E *Warhawk*. It will

include sandbagged revetments, a PSP (pierced steel planking) hardstand, some manikins in authentic uniforms, machine guns and possibly a jeep. Stop in and talk to Rich if you want to help. ✪



▲ (l. to r.) Carl Wright, Rich Rollins and Fernie Oliveras apply sanding pads and elbow grease to the MiG-21PFM. Carl points out the original East German markings that were revealed when the West German Maltese Cross insignia was sanded off.

For more information, visit:

[www.war-eagles-air-museum.com](http://www.war-eagles-air-museum.com)