WESTPAC

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in as close to original condition as possible. So we made a deal and became owners of a P-47." The plane was trucked back to Rialto and WestPac would soon find that the whole direction of their operation would change.

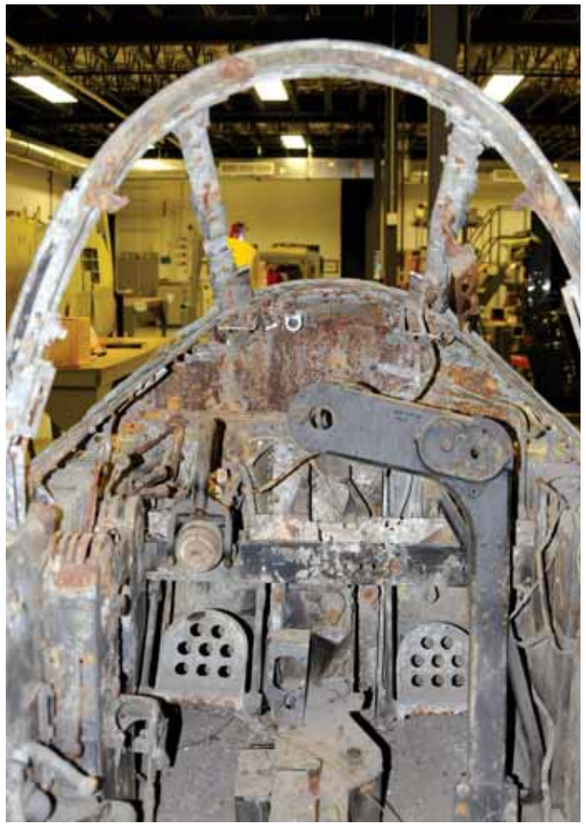
The guys tore into the Thunderbolt and quickly discovered the complex nature of the aircraft — especially when compared to a Mustang. The word got around that WestPac was rapidly becoming the place to go to if you wanted P-47 restoration work (WestPac had perfected the manufacture of P-47 spars/spar caps — something that many said could not be done). This news attracted John Schoffner who contracted with WestPac to complete his partially restored Thunderbolt and he was followed by Neal Melton who purchased a Thunderbolt project and had WestPac do a ground-up restoration.

Tail booms, verticals, horizontal stabilizer, and wings for *White 33* in their jigs.

The quality and detail of WestPac's work soon attracted the new Flying Heritage Collection and FHC transferred a P-51D to WestPac for a challenging new type of restoration — a restoration that would return the Mustang to the exact condition it was in when the rolled out of the North American factory. "This was a very big challenge," said Bill. "This was a type of restoration that had not been attempted and it called for a lot of work on our part as we carefully researched every P-51 blueprint to find out how to return the plane to original condition. Everything in this aircraft is as it was — wiring, inspector stamps, construction techniques, colors, cockpit, etc."

The extra work was well worth the effort and when the Mustang rolled out of the Rialto hangar, it was magnificent — no extra polishing, no chrome, bright plating, etc. This Mustang was a 1944 time capsule. The P-51D was soon followed by FHC's P-47D, which, in many ways, was more of a challenge. "That P-47 really became the standard to set everything else by," said Alan. Today, both aircraft can be seen at FHC's museum in Everett, Washington, where they are maintained in flying condition (as a quick note, we are not including WestPac's many pioneering B-25 activities, including flying off carriers, movie work, etc. These will be covered in a later issue).

Alan and Bill with the fuselage pod of *White 33*.



Cockpit of *White 33*.

After working all day on WestPac projects, Bill "Bill Dude" Barclay uses his spare time to complete his Stinson L-5 restoration.

Famed aviation artist Michael Turner did this painting of *White 33* returning to base after a collision with a Zero tore off a chunk of the right wing. The plane was soon repaired and back in combat.

With the rapid rise in the southern California economy and resulting real estate boom, news that Rialto Airport would be developed into an industrial center forced WestPac to make a number of hard decisions. "This turn of events made us start looking at other locations for WestPac. We also decided at the same time that we wanted to expand the facility and introduce even more state-of-the-art equipment," stated Bill.

A search led them to Colorado Springs, Colorado — an aviation and business friendly city that welcomed an enterprise such as WestPac. Detail design work got underway that would result in the construction of a splendid 65,000-sq-ft facility that Bill and Alan made sure was built exactly to their specifications. However, it would take over 90 trips with 18-wheelers to move all the equipment and parts.

"At Rialto, we had a very good facility but we wanted a larger space to efficiently cover all aspects of restoration. At Colorado Springs, we now have dedicated areas to metal forming, creating exact fixtures/jigs to hold the airframes, a dedicated paint shop, and a huge, organized storage area to contain our tens of thousands of parts and components," said Bill.

A walk through the sprawling facility gives the visitor a sense of the size as well as the coordinated work areas. In one area, P-38 tail booms and wings are in fixtures as they near completion. In another, turrets are being restored, while in yet another space the complex restoration of an F4U-4 Corsair is heading for completion. "Our metal shop is second to none," said Klaers. "We can take a damaged fillet or component and

A precise fixture for Lightning restorations being welded.

Alan and Bill with a complete QEC for a P-38L.