

What's happening at PIONEER AVSPECS



Over the 3-year period when we were rebuilding the P-40N1 A29-448 we sent out regular newsletters to keep everyone abreast of what was going on. These newsletters seem to have been received very favourably so we have decided to keep them up but now telling you about what's going on in general in our shop.

As most of you are aware, Pioneer Aero and Avspecs have moved. Pioneer from the factory in East Tamaki and Avspecs from Rotorua Airport. We have jointly purchased one of the old WWII hangars at Ardmore Airport south of Auckland and this has been completely refurbished. Both companies have now moved in and, are not only doing joint venture work, but also have individual contracts on the go.

And this is what's happening:

First project in the shop was a P-40E for Dick Thurman. No, this is not his K model which we finished last year, but another aircraft that Dick was involved with for some time. The aircraft was badly damaged in a landing accident many years ago and to date we have only received the wings. Since we've started work on the project Dick has on-sold the aircraft to Tony Banta and Tony has elected to have us complete the job. Both wings require complete structural rebuilds and as an indication of the extent of the rebuild we have had to start with brand new leading edge skins on both wings and work back from there. We're pleased to say that the left-hand wing is finished, as are flaps and ailerons and the wing tips are nearing completion. Work has started on the right-hand wing and this has been stripped. Component rebuilding for this has begun. The fuselage and the rest of the components are due to leave the US anytime now. The fuselage has sustained remarkably little damage and with an engine from Nixon due in six months, together with a fresh propeller we are confident that the aeroplane will be flying in March 2002 (in time for Wanaka!).



Dick/Tony's LH wing completed



Spars being started for Tony's RH wing

Second job in the shop is Ray Hanna's **Lavochkin La-9**. This aeroplane is a restorer's dream. It is in remarkable condition. We have found a small amount of corrosion and this is being rectified and the areas that have been opened up to get to this are now being re-skinned. The interior is finished and painted and most of the internal componentry and some of the external fairings have been rebuilt and are ready to go back in. Colin Denholm at Rotorua has begun rebuilding the systems components with the Flap Ram the first finished and Gear Retract Rams currently underway. New cockpit glass, both perspex (plexiglass) and bullet-proof front and rear screens, are on order. The biggest dilemma is how good a finish do we want on the aircraft - a lot of the original Russian components that are not structural, such as fairings and internal panelling is what can only be called agricultural in their finish. The question is, do we tidy them up and leave them truly representative of a Russian aircraft of this era or do we replace and rebuild which effectively "westernizes" its finish. Somewhere in between may well be the answer. Subject to engine and propeller being available on time there's a very real possibility that this one can fly early next year also.

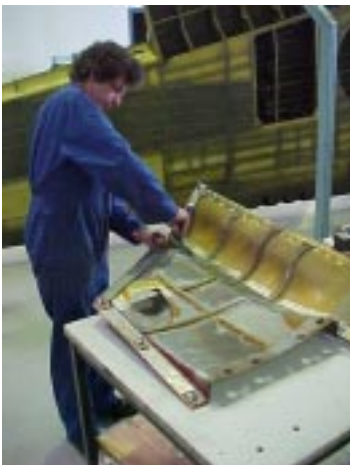
The intent is to paint this aircraft in the colours it would have worn when on charge with the Peoples Republic of China Air Force during the Korean War. Only problem is, we can't find anything definitive as to what that colour-scheme might be. We've looked in lots of Korean War books and while there are mentions of La-9s (most of which unfortunately refer to La-9s being shot down by F-86s!) ... no photos. Anybody got anything?



Fuse - almost finished



Interior awaiting fitout



Steel side cowl edge doublers being replaced



Lots of rebuilt La-9 parts!

The third aircraft is Jerry Yagen's **P-40E**. Jerry has forwarded us a whole heap of used components together with a completed fuselage and most of the components overhauled for a left-hand wing. We are converting this aircraft to a 2-seater with the removable vision panels and head rest, just as we did with our aircraft.

To date the two-seat conversion is well on its way and many of the smaller fuselage items, such as the oil tank, oil tank bay, rudder pedals and canopy are either rebuilt or under reconstruction. The left-hand wing is in the leading edge jig and is almost completed up to number 2 spar. When number 2 spar is finally riveted it will be removed from this jig and will be put into the main jig for final assembly. Work has commenced stripping the old right-hand wing components Jerry has provided as donors for his right-hand wing and by the end of next week this will be completed (not the wing, the stripping of components!). This is a very large project and is scheduled to be completed and flying by December 2002. Time and resources providing we will in fact try to complete this aircraft earlier.



Jerry's fuselage with 2-seat conversion underway



Jerry's LH leading edge assy nearly done



Jerry's donor wings come apart

Finally, Avspecs are expecting the ex-Alpine Fighter Collection **Mk14 Spitfire** to arrive from Rotorua shortly at which time work will start again in returning this to airworthiness. There's been lots done on it and we'll elaborate more in the next newsletter.

'Til next time ...

Garth & Warren