

# AEROPLANE



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**EE Lightning pilot** **HIDDEN HISTORY** Japan vs Russia in 1939



# National Museum of WW2

## MAJOR MUSEUM PROJECT

ONE OF THE most significant aviation heritage projects for many years, The National Museum of World War Two Aviation, was previewed at Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA, in early February.

Bill Klaers is Co-Chairman of the board of directors of the museum and also the president of the highly-regarded Westpac Restorations company, which has recently relocated to Colorado Springs from Rialto, California. He explains, "It will certainly not be a wax museum. We want it to be a fully interactive experience where the visitor can tailor their experience to their own specific requirements. The museum will offer information that can be adapted to all enquiries, from schoolchildren to serious scholars."

The idea for the museum started several years ago during a brainstorming session. Klaers elaborates: "We came up with a

**RIGHT** The fuselage nacelle of Lockheed P-38F Lightning 42-12652 White 33, a Pacific combat veteran.

**BELOW** The cover of the museum's brochure features USAAF ace Don Blakeslee, who died in 2008.



completed and the museum is currently in fundraising mode. "That isn't particularly easy in today's economic environment," says Klaers, "but we are making steady, significant progress and have a highly-regarded board of directors". Klaers continues, "Static aviation

will be introduced to all aspects of World War Two aircraft rebuild work.

### Thematic display areas

Advanced planning has the museum separated into six distinct sections. They will be: *Prelude*, America's isolationist period immediately before the war;

**We want it to be a fully interactive experience, where visitors**

vision that would utilise the latest in computer science and the expanding access to information. For example, an elementary-school teacher can bring a group of children to the museum, and we can tailor each portion of the museum to that specific group. We can then change the experience again for a group of women, a group of pilots, a group of veterans..."

Extensive groundwork has been

**BELOW** Aircraft including North American B-25J 44-29199 *In The Mood* and Douglas AD-6 Skyraider BuNo 139665/N665TC, which flew after restoration by Westpac in May 2009.

museums are killing themselves. We will not be overburdened by a collection of non-flying aircraft that are difficult to maintain, preserve, and cumbersome to present." This flexible aviation educational experience is a new concept and not one currently functioning in any American museum. Visitors to the museum will also have the option of touring the Westpac Restorations complex, where they will

*Mobilizing American Air Power*, the explosion of American production might after Pearl Harbor; *Weathering the Storm*, 1941-43, Japanese control of the Pacific and Germany's control of the Atlantic; *Striking Back* 1942-43, the Allied bombing campaign and the slow push to aerial dominance; *Controlling the Skies*, the destruction of the Japanese naval fleet and the co-ordinated invasion of Europe; and *Legacy*, the evolution of World War Two air power into today's modern air force.

### Local heritage an asset

Colorado Springs is also home to the USAF Academy; the area boasts a strong aviation heritage, and many professionals have volunteered for duty at the museum. With the concept completed and buildings erected, initial fundraising will commence in order to put all the various components together.

Following its relocation, Westpac Restorations is now operating from brand-new 65,000ft<sup>2</sup> headquarters, located on a three-acre site. The buildings feature state-of-the-art equipment that represents a quantum jump for warbird restoration.

While at Rialto, Westpac had gained an enviable reputation for its extremely



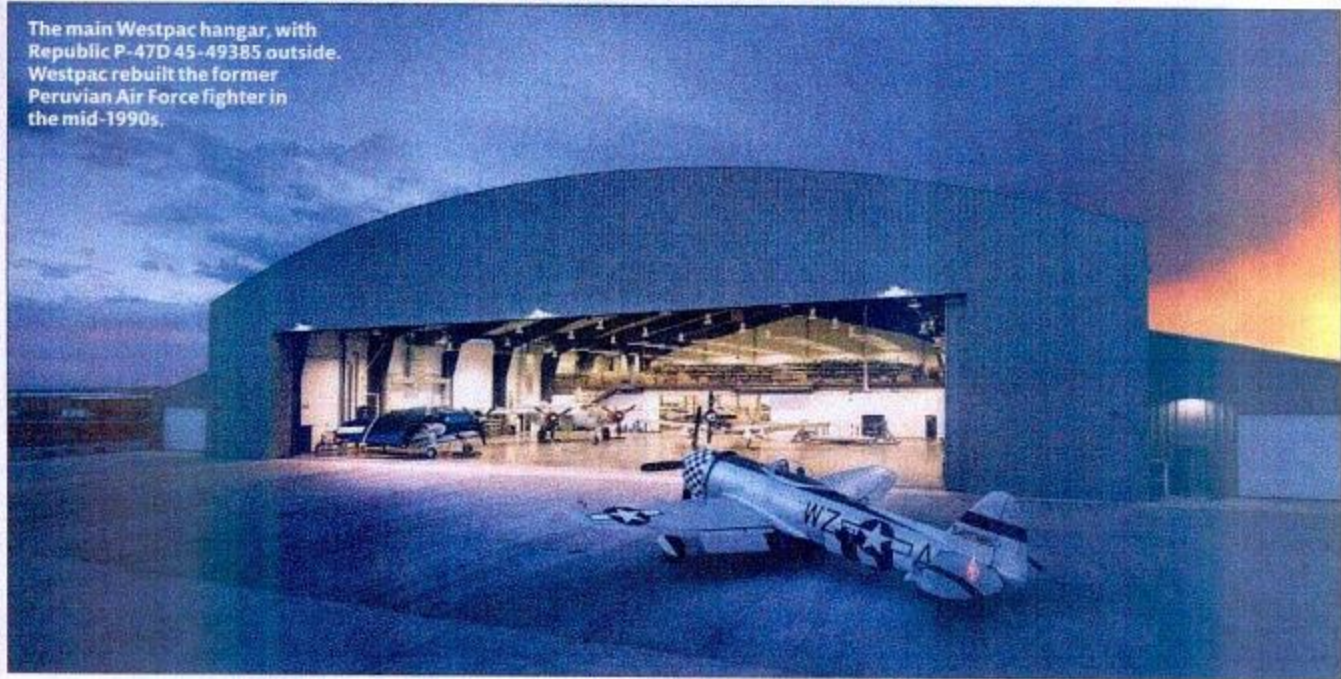


*"Soviet and Mongolian troops crossed the Khalkin Gol and established a foothold . . . the first air combats largely spelt defeat for the Soviets"*

Vladimir Kotelnikov reveals the little-known air war over Manchuria in 1939 **Page 16**

# Aviation to open in Colorado

The main Westpac hangar, with Republic P-47D 45-49385 outside. Westpac rebuilt the former Peruvian Air Force fighter in the mid-1990s.



PHOTOGRAPH BY GUY LAWRENCE

## can tailor their experience to their own specific requirements

detailed aircraft restorations. "We had an opportunity to move to Colorado Springs and create a facility according to our specifications", says Klaers. "Rialto was great, but we needed a much larger space to cover all aspects of restoration efficiently. At Colorado Springs we have areas dedicated to metal-forming, creating jigs to hold the airframes, a paint shop, and a huge well-organised storage area to contain our tens of thousands of parts."

### Specialist workshops

A walk through the sprawling building gives the visitor a sense of the size of the co-ordinated work areas. In one section Lockheed P-38 tailbooms and wings are in fixtures as they near completion. In another, turrets are being restored, while in yet another space the complex restoration of a Vought F4U-4 Corsair is heading for completion. "Our metal shop is second to none – in equipment and employees", says Klaers. "We can take a damaged fillet or component and recreate that part to its original specifications – this is something extremely useful for complex aircraft like the Lockheed P-38".

Westpac also has a propeller workshop and all the heavy equipment needed for restoring World War Two



**ABOVE** The gleaming booms and tail of the P-38F. When it flies it will be the second-oldest airworthy P-38, the oldest being Texas-based P-38F 41-7630 *Glacier Girl*.



**ABOVE** The centre section of a Vought F4U-4 Corsair under restoration in Westpac's state-of-the-art restoration workshops at Colorado Springs.

props to airworthy condition. Klaers says, "This is an extremely important addition to our business since it is a specialised art, and good propeller shops are very few and far between."

### Blueprint treasure-trove

Westpac also has a dedicated computer room which processes the tens of thousands of pages of factory plans the company uses for its projects. "In many instances we have every known drawing or blueprint for a particular aircraft, and this allows complete accuracy", says Klaers. "We have also built an extensive series of jigs for aircraft such as the Lockheed P-38, Republic P-47 and North American P-51.

"Currently, one of our most important projects is to return Lockheed P-38F *White 33* to the air. It was one of the first four P-38s to enter combat in the Pacific theatre. Several pilots that went on to become top aces flew this aircraft. We have acquired very large stocks of P-38 spares and are preparing several more examples of this famous fighter for restoration to flying condition."

With restorations booked several years into the future, Westpac is looking forward to some extremely significant warbird restorations that the company hopes to announce in the near future.