



**FRIDAY NIGHT
OLDIES**
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VINTAGE EX-MILITARY
AIRCRAFT LONG BEFORE THEY
BECAME SUBJECTS OF
MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR
RESTORATIONS



Sometimes rare aircraft survive because the airfields at which they were abandoned were quite remote. That was the case for one of the last surviving Douglas A-20 Havocs. A-20G-45-DO USAAF 43-22210 was purchased surplus by Hearst Magazines in San Francisco with the sole purpose of converting the plane into a high-speed executive transport. This particular aircraft was flown from the factory to McClellan AAF near Sacramento where it joined with the 4127th Base Unit. However, it appears that it did not do much flying and was put into storage. On 3 December 1945, it was flown to Cal-Aero Field (today's Chino Airport) and placed with the hundreds of other stored aircraft. It was probably picked by the Hearst people because of its extremely low flight time. Registered as NL67921 on 3 June 1946, the plane was extensively modified with seating in the rear fuselage, behind the single-place pilot position, and in the nose. Extra windows were added for all these positions but the ride must have been somewhat uncomfortable because the Havoc's fuselage is narrow and probably did not allow much freedom of movement. By 1950, Hearst had divested themselves of the Havoc and it went through a couple of other owners before being purchased by Lynn Roberts on 27 April 1956. Roberts owned at least one other Havoc and a B-18 Bolo and the planes were converted to large acreage sprayers with chemical tanks where the executives once rode and spray bars under the wings. Based out of Boise, Idaho, Roberts operated the plane through 1959 and then it went to several other owners before being parked. As its condition went downhill, members of the then-Confederate Air Force learned of the plane's existence and visited Boise. A deal was struck and a crew was dispatched to get the aircraft ready for a ferry flight to their then-base at Harlingen, Texas. As noted, the plane was not in good condition and it took some work but the ferry flight departed on 12 September 1966. Once at Harlingen, the workers really dug into the airframe and engines. After a considerable amount of work and expenditure of money, it took to the air again during 1976. Nowhere near the quality of Aero Trader's Havoc restoration for Rod Lewis, the rare A-20 was an instant attraction but on 8 October 1988, the plane met its end. The 70-year-old pilot (who had funded much of the rebuild) was flying the aircraft at the CAF's Airsho 88. As part of a flight of three, a series of turns were instigated but the A-20G entered a right uncontrolled descending turn and did not recover. The plane impacted on level terrain and exploded. The pilot, who was suffering from severe arteriosclerosis, had a major heart attack and passed out turning the turn.



Attractively finished P-51D 44-74230 N5466V at San Jose, California, during the early 1960s when it was owned by Bob Bixler. The plane had been sold at one of the McClellan AFB Mustang auctions but suffered an accident soon after. On 13 February 1959, it made an off-airport landing at San Jose and apparently flipped over but we have not been able to find an official accident report. On 29 October 1967 the pilot landed with gear up at Fresno, California. Repaired, the aircraft was sold to David Norland who raced it at Reno during the 1970s as Race 76 *No Name Dame*. Stored for many years, in 2000 it was purchased by Jack Roush and restored by American Aero Services and Cal Pacific Airmotive. Registered N51CY and finished in Chuck Yeager's markings *Glamorous Glen III*, the Mustang made its first post-restoration flight on 5 August 2003. However, after considerable controversy involving Yeager, Roush had the plane reregistered as N551J and repainted as *Gentleman Jim* to honor Capt. Jim Browning. The Mustang was recently purchased by Bob Bull in Florida.

Following the end of WWII, inexpensive surplus military aircraft were often utilized as roadside attractions by business owners who hoped such features would increase profit. Today, virtually all of those aircraft have succumbed to time or to restorers who have removed the planes to return to flight. One example does remain near Fresno, California, and it can be seen atop a gas station although few, if any customers, realize it is a WWII Vultee BT-13 Valiant basic trainer. Just one of thousands sold surplus, the remains of the N# can still be made out on the right wing.

