

# FRIDAY NIGHT OLDIES



BY DOUG FISHER

The decade comprising the 1970s was a time of intense Warbird activity in the southern California area and virtually every airfield boasted a number of ex-military aircraft. Long Beach Airport was no exception and it was home to numerous Consolidated Catalinas including PBY-5A BuNo 34016/N5583V that was photographed on 10 May 1972. Finished in a pleasing civilian scheme, the aircraft was relatively stock and still retained most of its nose turret along with fuselage blisters. As can be seen, a door and extra window had been added on the forward fuselage. Note much is known about this aircraft but it was based at several southern California airfields during this time period. Things get a bit mysterious with this aircraft when it was reported as being scuttled on purpose in Mexico's Infernillo Reservoir on 19 March 1974. The plane was reportedly on a drug run. Over the years, there have been reports of various proposals to salvage the aircraft but it seems nothing has come of them.

During the 1970s, numerous Warbirds were based at Van Nuys Airport and one of those was Don "Muldoon" Alderson's camouflaged North American T-28A Trojan USAF 49-1673/N9611C. Don was well-known in the car and air racing industry and his need for speed was exemplified with his T-28. After a taxiing accident, he replaced the 800-hp engine with a 1625-hp Wright radial that turned the plane into a real screamer. Wearing its unusual camouflage scheme, Don and the T-28 were often seen in formation with many of the Mustangs then based at the field. He sold the aircraft in the early 1970s and it eventually went to the Confederate Air Force where it was destroyed in a crash on 9 May 1987 at Tatum, New Mexico, that killed the pilot and passenger.



Numerous vintage aircraft operated out of an area of Van Nuys Airport during the 1970s that was given the nickname of "The Jungle." It was also one of the more historic portions of the airfield and many 1930s through 1950s movies were filmed in that location. The area, and its numerous historic hangars, have long been bulldozed but one of the company's operating from "The Jungle" was Volpar — know for their many conversions to the Beech Model 18. This interesting ex-USAF C-45G 51-11897/N87681 was at Volpar for work on 9 May 1971. After USAF service, the aircraft went through several governmental agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency and it is seen with various air sampling modifications. The plane is now on display at the Castle Air Museum in central California.



One of the odder Warbirds to be imported into the USA was the Percival Pembroke. Ten of twelve Pembroke C.51s operated by the Belgium Air Force were purchased by Air America Inc. and imported. This outfit was a fairly brazen collection of drug runners and the Pembrokes were immediately put to work in illegal activities. Several were destroyed and others impounded. Some ex-Royal Air Force aircraft also received US civil registrations and one of those was WV741/N72494, seen here in an overall grey paint scheme.