BACK IN THE EARLY 1960s, MIKE DILLON MADE THE DECISION TO PURCHASE A RATHER BEDRAGGLED CURTISS WARHAWK AND RETURN IT TO FLYING CONDTION. LITTLE DID HE REALIZE THAT HIS ACTIONS WOULD FORM THE BASIS FOR TODAY'S GLOBAL WARBIRD MOVEMENT

IN THE BEGINNING

CONCLUSION

BY MIKE DILLON

The Warhawk rests now on the ramp of Rebel Field at Mercedes, Texas. Stenciled ever so softly on the sides of its polished red fuselage are gray soot trails from its exhaust stacks. Having flown her from Arizona to try and sell the P-40N to the Confederate Air Force, I feel more like a door-to-door peddler than an airplane enthusiast. But, peddle I must so that I can provide for my family some of the luxuries of life — like food, house, clothes. Really, it's not quite that bad yet, but the financial balancing act is getting a bit shaky.

In my pocket are only eleven dollars for expenses and credit cards for fuel. So there won't be much time for any long-winded sales talk. If the CAF isn't interested, I must leave tomorrow and head for Houma, Louisiana, to show the Warhawk to Bill Fornof, who has expressed some interest.

But, not being a salesman at heart, I decided to put off any such unpleasant sales pitch

A final view of the P-40N in Dillon's scheme a few days before it was sold to the CAF.

until after tonight's Rebel Ball, in order to enjoy the company of these fellow aviators for a while. How does the saying go? Pleasure before business?

Meeting the troops while having lunch in their Officers' Club, I hear the unmistakable sound of a P-38 starting engines. Marvin "Lefty" Gardner is about to fly the Lightning "for his own amazement," and, never having seen a P-38 in the air, I move outside for a better view. Lefty does a beautiful job of beating up the field — point rolls, loops, low passes. The sight of the huge fighter and the harmony of those big Allisons is positively inspiring.

That night at the Ball, mint juleps flow until early morning and it's one o'clock the next afternoon before the airport begins to stir. There's little time for business talk now; a large crowd of members and friends have gathered to watch flight exhibitions by Henry Gardner in the Hellcat and Gerald Martin in the agile Wildcat. Though embarrassed by the thought of flying in front of all these people, I'm persuaded by George Waters to fly my red P-40 alongside his white P-40.

Two Six November's Allison is getting a bit cranky to start so George takes off first. Several minutes later, I join up. After a low pass with opposing slow rolls, George brakes off and lands. Figuring the red P-40 should have equal time with the white one, I stay aloft for a while. It's not every day a guy gets a chance to do Cuban eights off the deck *on an airport!* Later, at dinner, Connie Edwards extends a typical Rebel compliment, "Mike yours was the finest exhibition today of anybody flying a red P-40."

So another day passes. Fortunately, everyone else is busy picking up the tabs, and my eleven dollars is still intact.

Morning #2 begins with a problem. The P-40's Allison is now *very* hard to start and checks poor on both mags. Its ten-cent surplus spark plugs have evidently given up. A call to a friend in El Paso brings a set of new plugs. But it's afternoon before they arrive and the plugs help very little. Further investigation indicates a bad booster coil is our main trouble. With that replaced, everything seems okay — not exactly perfect, but then how long can a guy hang around on eleven dollars?

P-40N N1226N soon after being purchased by the Confederate Air Force. Dillon was completely correct when, after studying several civilian schemes, he stated the overall red with no trim was the most attractive. As soon as the CAF obtained the fighter, they added shark's teeth, some trim, and the CAF name, all of which detracted from the overall lines of the P-40N.

PROFILE