

LOOKING FOR A BIT OF ADVENTURE,
 CARL SCHOLL AND TONY RITZMAN SET OUT ON AN
 EXPEDITION INTO THE INHOSPITABLE CALIFORNIA DESERT TO FIND
 A CRASHED MUSTANG

THE SEARCH FOR 332

BY CARL SCHOLL FOR

Any aviation enthusiast worth his salt has boxes and boxes of aircraft-related items — you know, those boxes that we all intend to sort out and get in order “some day.” Well, the same is true for those of us at Aero Trader. One recent morning I decided to devote a couple of hours digging into a few boxes,

One of those impossibly clear days in southern California. It was during January 1973 when Dave Zeuschel in N332 and a flock of about six other Mustangs were headed up the coast to Santa Barbara for a Saturday outing. (M. O’Leary)

keeping what I wanted, and throwing the rest out. Our A-20 Havoc was due to arrive at Chino from New York a bit later in the day and I was going to take advantage of this breather.

Of course, upon opening the first box I immediately began a trip down memory lane — a process that slowed me down.

Inside the first layer was an envelope full of fading prints and I was transported back to 1981 as I went through photo after photo.

That year, Aero Trader was starting to pick up steam. Along with partner Tony Ritzman we had established our base of operation near Borrego Springs in a vast expanse of California desert. We had a dirt airstrip, a number of buildings and sheds, and several B-25 Mitchells parked randomly around the remote outpost. There was no “ramp” — just a flat piece of desert where the R-2600s could quietly drip oil into the sand.

We were new to the Warbird game — both of us coming from the high-performance car/off-road vehicle world. We really did not know all that much about aviation but had just acquired our first Mitchell. Chino was still in the distant future as well as our pilot licenses. We had been bitten by the B-25 bug and our desert location was beginning to develop into what would become the world’s largest supply of anything and everything related to the twin-engine, twin-tailed bomber that had carved its way into history in the skies above the world’s battlefronts.

The first layer of photos consisted basically of scenes in and around our desert headquarters but the second was a bit more interesting. The fading color prints recorded one of our earliest Warbird expeditions — recovering a wrecked P-51D Mustang.

So, how did this expedition take place? Tony and I had heard that a Mustang had been lost in the Borrego Desert on 21 August 1979, but we really did not think much about the incident. Later, a good friend of ours, Fred Miller, was telling us that he had used



This gives an idea of the nature of the terrain in which the pieces of N332 rained down. (Aero Trader)

his Piper as part of the search effort to find the pilot and Mustang. As I recall, it took them several days but they finally found the wreckage. Unfortunately, the pilot had died in the crash.

The more Fred talked about the Mustang, the more interested we became. We enquired on what happened to the wreck and Fred said that, as far as he knew, the Mustang was left where found — mainly (continued on page 54)

