RESTORATION UPDATE

Midwest MESSERSCHMITT

AT DANVILLE, ILLINOIS, A RARE* LUFTWAFFE *FIGHTER IS ON ITS WAY TO FLY ONCE AGAIN

BY JAMES THOMPSON

The assembled Bf 109G-6 on the Midwest ramp. As can be seen, considering the aircraft had been underwater for nearly five-decades the overall condition is remarkable.

Located at Vermilion Regional Airport, Danville, Illinois, Midwest Aero Restoration's Mike VadeBonCouer and his talented workforce are well-known for restoring a string of award-winning North American P-51D Mustangs. Each Mustang that has left the Midwest shop is a masterpiece of the restorer's art that brings us closer and closer to the actual configuration of these aircraft when they faced the *Luftwaffe* and warplanes of the other Axis powers.

Therefore, the newest arrival at Midwest is somewhat of a surprise — an authentic Messerschmitt Bf 109G-6; the aircraft that was the arch-enemy of Mustang pilots! As most aviation enthusiasts realize, the 109 was produced in a bewildering series of variants so let's take a moment to describe the G-6. The unpressurized G-6 and pressurized G-5 first appeared in February and September 1943 respectively. Very similar to the previous G-4/G-5, the only major difference was the substitution of cowling-mounted MG 131 machine guns in place of the earlier MG 17s.

The pressurized Bf 106G-5 was built in far fewer numbers (less than 500) than the G-6 and was the last Bf 109 pressurized variant to fly operationally. However, the Bf 109G-6 was the most important variant of this famous German fighter — over 12,000 G-6s were built, more than a third of the entire production run for the type.

Despite increased Allied bombing, the German factories were churning these fighters out in vast numbers from early February 1943 until June 1944. The G-6 series represents a turning point in many ways, for the period during which it was produced spanned from the severe reversals on the Eastern Front to the Allied invasion at Normandy. The G-6 was produced in numerous sub-variants, but those are outside the scope of this article as we are going to concentrate on one particular aircraft.

THE SAGA OF BF 109G-6 WK/N 410077

In the 1980s and early 1990s with the collapse of the Soviet Union, small groups of aviation enthusiasts realized that a new capitalist endeavor could be created by searching for and finding WWII aircraft — especially those from the *Luftwaffe*. These groups learned that there was money to be made from the "crazy Westerners" that wanted such airframes. One such group was *Retrotechnika* and they began searching likely areas where they knew intense aerial combats had taken place during the Second World War.

Their searching paid off in 1990, when they discovered a sunken Bf 109 in the Pskov region. It appears that the aircraft had made an emergency landing on Lake Swiblo and had sunk. The recoverers could make out partial fuselage codes while the number +36318 was clearly visible on the Daimler-Benz DB 605A engine along with the date 15 September 1943, the date the engine was installed at the factory.

Initially, the airframe was moved to Monino Airfield near Moscow. It moved to several other locations while research into the aircraft's exact identity continued along with efforts to find a buyer.

The fighting on the Eastern Front between the Germans and Russians was as vicious as war could get. It was a no holds barred conflict that saw deaths in the millions. This huge theater of war is unknown to most Americans today, but it is still very real to the Russians and Germans. While research was going on, the Bf 109G-6 was sold to David Prewett in Australia and he renewed efforts to find out as much about this particular aircraft as possible.

A huge amount of effort was expended in finding the aircraft's identity and this search was greatly aided by German researcher Charles Bavoroise. It was determined the fighter was built under license by Erla.

By the winter of 1943, Russian forces had advanced to the Estonian/Russian border that ran down a line formed by Lake Peipus/Lake Swiblo, north of Pskov. The fighting front stagnated on this north/south line until early 1944.