

This is TP-39Q-5-BE 42-20024 that apparently served as the prototype for the Q series of dual-control trainers. Note that its fins are not to the standard of the Q-22-BE series. The serial on this photo has been airbrushed out.



TP-39Q 44-3879 carrying a centerline external fuel tank. This aircraft was extensively damaged in a ground loop while landing at Laredo AAFB on 1 September 1944. The plane was assigned to the 2126 Base Unit and was being flown by Anderson King.



# AIRACOBRA FOR TWO

**PERHAPS THE LEAST ATTRACTIVE OF ALL TWO-SEAT FIGHTER MODIFICATIONS, THE DUAL-CONTROL TP-39Q WAS DEFINITELY A LIMITED PRODUCTION AIRCRAFT**

**BY HOWARD CARTER**



Detail of the insignia on 42-20024.

Beauty and the beast: Sleek P-39Q 42-19642 contrasts with a bulbous TP-39Q on the ramp at Laredo AAFB. The single-seater was damaged in a landing accident at Thermal AAFB on 10 January 1944. At the time, the aircraft was assigned to the 97th TRS, 78th TRG, and was being flown by Jack Price.

As we have previously noted, most nations built some form of dual-control trainer of their most numerous fighters and perhaps the Bf 109G-12 (shown elsewhere in this issue) was built in the largest numbers. Bell Aircraft Company was not immune from these conversions and since the P-39 had developed somewhat of a reputation as a “bad spinner” or “tumbler,” then perhaps such a conversion was wise.

It appears that the first such two-seat Airacobra conversion was a modified P-39F. A standard aircraft was pulled from the line and modified to have a cockpit directly ahead of the standard position. To do this, all of the armament was removed from the nose section and a second seat and rudimentary dual controls were installed in their place. The aircraft, unofficially referred to as the “TP-39” (we have not been able to find a serial nor a photo of this aircraft and help from readers would be appreciated).

Once the aircraft was completed and briefly flight tested at Bell, it was



This side view of TP-39Q 44-3908, carrying the training code N-M, shows the greatly enlarged canopy to advantage.

flown to Georgia and the Thomasville Army Air Field for testing by pilots of the 59th Fighter Group as a fixed gunnery and instrument training aircraft.

One big liability immediately became evident: The front-seater did not have brakes.

