alive at the Warhawk Air Museum.

The museum, in a hangar at the Caldwell Industrial Airport, is chock full of items that stir recollections in those who lived through the war and stir the imaginations of young 'uns who didn't.

Among the collectibles:

➤ A coconut mailed home to Caldwell by one young G.I. "Can you imagine how far that coconut would get today?" asks John Paul, John-Curtiss Paul's father.

➤ The first flight simulator, a wooden toy-like invention developed by a man who played pipe organ in movie theaters.

➤ A samurai sword carbon-dated to the 14th century, Joan of Arc's time.

➤ A North American P-51 C Mustang plane — one of only five believed to be left in the world. The fighter plane escorted bombers, taking care of snipers so the bombers could accomplish their missions. "It changed the war for the United States and its allies," John-Curtiss Paul said.

➤ A Curtiss P40 N Warhawk, one of only a couple believed to be left in existence.

➤ A Gibson Girl radio that troops cranked up when stranded. A box kite served as the transmitter.

➤ Heavy snow skis that let Mustang planes get off snow fields in the Aleutian Islands. Most people never knew such things existed, John-Curtiss Paul said.

➤ A fold-up World War II paratrooper bicycle that paratroopers used for ground transportation.

➤ A Norden Bomb Sight, so top secret that Allies would destroy them if they had the slightest notion they might end up in enemy hands. The sights enabled them to bomb accurately from high altitudes long before cruise-guided missiles became vogue.

➤ A portable remote emergency landing strip kit.

John Paul, who's fond of quipping that he was born during the battle of Midway in 1942, says the museum is the result of a "hobby gone crazy." He started collecting World War II memorabilia when he began restoring a fighter plane in 1966.

He has restored several World War II planes, many which were hulks rusting in junk piles when he started. He flies a few of them at air shows.

"Just to hear them and watch them fly sends chills up and down my spine," he said.

His wife, Sue Paul, serves as curator at the museum. Right-hand man John-Curtiss Paul has inherited his parents' enthusiasm.

"World War II was the last time this country ever united around one effort — and it's probably the last time it ever will," John-Curtiss Paul said.

When John Paul moved his hydraulic cutting tool manufacturing company to Meridian from the Bay area in 1986, he rented the hangar to store his collection. When he opened it to the public, he was greeted with an unexpected bonanza — people from all over the Treasure Valley began donating their own private World War II stashes.

With their help, the museum has several collections not often found in museums, John-Curtiss Paul said.

Among them:

➤ One of the largest women's uniform collections in the Pacific Northwest. The women's display includes a salute to the Womens Air Force Service Pilots (WASPs), the first American women to fly for the military.

➤ A German exhibit, which includes a U-Boat commander's uniform.

➤ Exhibits showing what life was like for the folks left stateside, with plywood fighter plane kits, Japanese lingo cards that let Mom and kids learn Japanese while playing cards and a pin-cushion Hitler (the U.S. version of a voodoo doll?).

"People come out to see the airplanes and they don't expect to see all this other stuff," John-Curtiss Paul said. "But we have it. And new things come in all the time."