




As Delivered by Goodyear

DENNIS BERGSTROM
WARBIRD #6691

One of the many exciting things for warbird enthusiasts attending EAA AirVenture Oshkosh each year is the anticipation of seeing new warbird restorations. This year the buzz centered on a pristine Goodyear FG-1D Corsair owned by Gary Kohs of Royal Oak, Michigan. This Corsair, tail number NX106FG and bureau number 92106, arrived at EAA AirVenture scarcely a week after its first flight, having been restored to very high “as delivered by Goodyear” standards. NX106FG fittingly became the fourth Corsair and the third FG-1D to win an Oshkosh Grand Champion or Reserve Grand Champion warbird award (the others being Kalamazoo Air Zoo’s FG-1D in 1980, and both Max Chapman’s F4U-4 and Ray Dieckman’s FG-1D in 2000).

Bent-wing History

Factory records show that 12,654 Corsairs were built between 1942 and 1953, the longest production run for any World War II era fighter. To keep up with demands from the fronts (especially the Southwest Pacific), three different companies produced the F4U Corsair—Chance Vought (the original design company), Brewster, and



Gary Kohs' Grand Champion FG-1D Corsair

Goodyear. Records show that 4,017 Goodyear versions, designated as FG-1s, FG-1Ds, and F2Gs, rolled off the assembly line at the huge Akron, Ohio, plant during the war.

FG-1D 92106 was built in 1945 as part of the last batch of this model of Corsair and delivered to the Navy in the South Pacific where it was used as a pool airplane. It got a little bent up there as it was used by the Marines and the Navy. Returning to the States after the war, 92106 served in the Naval Reserve until becoming surplus in 1958 at Naval Air Station (NAS) Spokane, Washington. Len Berryman purchased the bent-wing bird in 1958 and trucked it to Bridgeport, Washington, as part of his amusement park/playground operation. It sat at Berryman Park until 1973 when David Tallichet, owner of Military Aircraft Restoration Corp. of Long Beach, California, purchased the Corsair for use in a proposed television series about World War II Marine ace Pappy Boyington.

Along with the P-51, the B-17, and the Spitfire, the Corsair is one warbird most recognized by the general public. Much of that sight recognition comes from being featured in the popular 1970s *Black Sheep Squadron* television series starring Robert Conrad. At that time kids sat in front of their television sets and watched the highly rated show while building models of the Corsair; others had to wait until the sold-out hobby shops could restock. Kids staged dogfights in their backyards with their bent-wing birds.

FG-1D 92106 served as the lead aircraft for the series, flying in 22 episodes along with seven other Corsairs. After the series ended, Tallichet flew it to several *Black Sheep Squadron* reunions before putting it into storage.

Childhood Dream into Adult Reality

Like many of us, Gary Kohs started his love of warbirds quite early. As a young boy in Michigan, he frequently saw Corsairs fly over his home from the nearby Grosse Isle NAS. At 7 years old he begged his parents to take him to the base to see the Corsairs up close, which they did. He then announced to his parents that he was going to own a Corsair one day. They probably said, "That's nice, son," but he meant it.

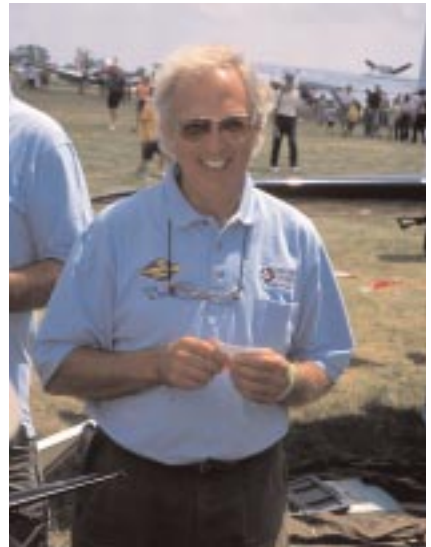
Working toward his dream, Gary collected Corsair parts for more than 30 years. During that time, he also bought a North American SNJ and had it restored. This allowed him to get the tailwheel and advanced trainer experience needed to move up to a powerful fighter like the Corsair. He looked at purchasing several Corsair airframes but passed on them because they weren't just right. And then in 1989, he finally found the aircraft he wanted in Tallichet's 92106. And he already knew which man he trusted to inspect the aircraft for him and then restore it to his standards if he bought it—John Lane Jr.

The former director of maintenance and restoration at Champlin Fighter Aircraft Museum in Mesa, Arizona, John also worked for an Idaho warbird restoration shop. His interest in warbirds stems from his dad, John Lane Sr., who was a six-victory P-38 ace in the Southwest Pacific during World War II. John and his wife, Nancy, started their own restoration shop, Airpower Unlimited, in 1988 at Jerome County Airport, Idaho.

Their first projects involved the static restoration of the Seattle Museum of Flight's FG-1D Corsair that had crashed into Lake Washington in 1950 and was recovered from the freshwater lake in 1984, and an SNJ-



Airpower Unlimited owners Nancy and John Lane Jr. with shop foreman Hugh Syme (R).



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Corsair caretaker Gary Kohs.

there has been some controversy over original Corsair cockpit colors, the Airpower Unlimited team conducted a great deal of research to ensure that the interior paint is as authentic as possible.

When the decision was made to take the aircraft to EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2003 for judging, the Airpower Unlimited crew revved up to full speed getting the last-minute finish details completed. John took the aircraft up for its first post-restoration flight on Saturday, July 26, and flew it several more times over the next few days to find and fix all of the squawks before arriving in Oshkosh on Wednesday, July 30. Now that's a fresh restoration!

For their hard work and success in reaching their goal of restoring an as-built Corsair, Gary received the Grand Champion World War II trophy, and John and his Airpower Unlimited team received a Golden Wrench award.

Grand Champion Still Not Perfect

In their continued drive to make sure that this Corsair is in original stock condition, Gary and John have changed several items on the Corsair since its award-winning appearance at Oshkosh. Some of these minor changes were already planned, but others came about from constructive comments by World War II pilots and ground crew that viewed the

6 for none other than Gary Kohs. John had done such an excellent job on the SNJ that Gary knew he was the man for his Corsair.

John went down to Chino, California, to inspect the aircraft and came back with a positive report, upon which Gary purchased 92106 in 1990 from British warbird collector Stephen Grey. Grey had recently purchased it, along with an F6F Hellcat, from Tallichet. Airpower Unlimited received the Corsair in the spring of 1990 to begin restoration work.

Original Parts Means Long Restoration

Little did everyone know that this restoration would take 17,000 man-

hours spread over 13 years to complete, mostly because of the high standards set for the restoration. No other Corsair has been stripped down this completely and restored with so many original parts, using microfilmed plans to follow everything the way that Goodyear did.

Both Gary and John collected original bits and pieces from wherever they could be found, from radio parts to wing rocket attachment brackets. Borrowed parts from other Corsair restorations, especially Butch Schroeder's ex FG-1D project that also flew in the television series, were used as patterns to manufacture new ones as necessary. Since



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These replica rockets don't weigh quite as much as the originals, but still add some hefty weight to the Corsair.



The cockpit was kept as original as possible, even down to the interior paint colors.

aircraft at EAA AirVenture and noticed some detail differences.

While many warbird restorations are much lighter than the original combat versions, NX106FG carries quite a few of its combat-ready pounds. For example, the eight replica 5-inch rockets weigh 107 pounds each (the originals weighed 183 pounds), 480 pounds of ammunition fill the gun bays in the wings,

and the original radio equipment adds more weight. The drop tanks weigh 84 pounds each when empty and hold 150 gallons, adding 1,800 pounds to the aircraft when full.

Gary is quick to point out that he considers himself the caretaker of this aircraft, *not* the owner, and he is eager to share the aircraft with the aviation world to honor the men and women who built and flew this ma-

chine. In the interest of preserving aviation history, NX106FG will fly often in the months and years ahead. By the time this article is printed, the Corsair will have been to the Reno Air Races to compete for the Rolls-Royce Aviation Heritage Invitational trophy, and has also been invited to Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, for the U.S. Air Force's Centennial of Flight/50th Anniversary of the Thun-



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Gary's Grand Champion FG-1D Corsair on display at EAA AirVenture 2003.

derbirds celebration in November. Sometime in the near future the Corsair will appear in Akron, Ohio, for a reunion with former Goodyear employees, including many Corsair pilots. You can also look for an upcoming book about the aircraft's builders, history, and restoration.

Gary's two warbirds and the Museum of Flight FG-1D are not the only aircraft that Airpower Unlimited has been working on for the last 14

13 years. John and his crew have developed a solid reputation for high quality and honest work on other warbirds as well, including Danny Summer's TBM-3E, which won the Grand Champion World War II award at Oshkosh 1996 (and John's team their first Golden Wrench award). More recently Airpower Unlimited worked on Mike George's F4U-5 Corsair after its engine fire several years ago. John's crew, under

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the able and talented leadership of shop foreman Hugh Syme, is now restoring Frank Arrufat's FG-1D Corsair, Brian Reynolds's FG-1D Corsair, and Tim Savage's PV-2 Harpoon. With Airpower's penchant for excellent work, they should all be aircraft to watch when they're completed.

Note: The writer would like to thank Gary Kohs, John Lane Jr. and his wife, Nancy, and Hugh Syme for their time and cooperation in writing this article. Visit www.airpowerunlimited.com for more information on current Airpower Unlimited restorations. ✈