

“Fatal Fang” Flies Again

BY JAN TEGLER | PHOTOS BY @CRAIGREMBOLDPHOTOGRAPHY

WHEN WARBIRO PILOT Mark Todd pulled back on the stick and left the runway at Chino Airport on November 30, 2023, it was the first time that “Fatal Fang,” the P-63A-7 acquired by Yanks Air Museum founder Charles Nichols in 1977, had flown in 40 years.

“Overall it flew great,” Todd reported, noting the extensive restoration work done by the California museum’s Flight Team led by Frank and Casey Wright to make “Fatal Fang” airworthy again.

The Kingcobra was first restored in the late 1970s and flew sporadically between 1979 and 1983. Thereafter, the airplane was on static display as part of Nichols’ terrific collection, now numbering more than 200 historic aircraft. But in recent years, Yanks’ leadership decided that more of the aircraft in the collection should be flying. The restoration of “Fatal Fang,” begun in May 2018, marks the third warbird the museum has returned to the skies over the last decade, including its Lockheed UC-40A Electra and Stinson L-5 Sentinel.

It also brings the number of airworthy P-63s back to four, following the November 2022 loss of the American Airpower Heritage Flying Museum’s rare P-63F, pilot Craig Hutain, and five crew members onboard the B-17G “Texas Raiders” in a midair collision during the CAF Wings Over Dallas airshow.

Casey Wright, the grandson of founder Nichols, says further flightworthy restorations are underway or planned. The Flight



Left to right: Casey Wright, Joe Yancey, Randy Purdey, and Taylor Stevenson discussing the nose gear prior to a high speed taxi test.

Team is already in advanced stages of bringing Yanks’ Grumman F6F-3 Hellcat back to life with a post-restoration first flight planned for mid-2024.

Reinvigorating the warbird’s complicated electric system, landing gear assemblies, cockpit, and flight controls was challenging, but creating aileron gap seals was the biggest hurdle the Yanks team overcame.

“There are no drawings from Bell for the gap seals,” Wright explains. “Randy Purdey [fellow Yanks restorer] and our upholsterer figured out what material to make the seals from and we balanced the ailerons. Mark Todd says our airplane flies better than all the other P-63s he’s flown.”

Delivered to the USAAF in May 1944, “Fatal Fang” served in California- and Oregon-based fighter training units until it was struck from service in 1945. Cal Aero purchased the fighter in 1950 from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation for use as a maintenance trainer at the company’s Glendale Airport-based Technical Institute.

Late Planes of Fame Museum scion Ed Maloney acquired the airplane in 1953 and stored it until he opened the museum in 1957. It moved with the collection to the museum’s present Chino location in 1973. Four years later, he sold it to Nichols.

Fellow Yanks pilots Taylor Stevenson and Chuck Gardner will also check out in the airplane and show off “Fatal Fang” at a number of airshows this season. ➔

Stevenson doing a high speed taxi test prior to the first flight.

