



# PROP WASH

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## Welcome

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## Militaria



Over 5,000 military items including weapons, uniforms, and munitions spanning the U.S. Civil War through Viet Nam are on display within the Legacy Flight Museum and are included with admission. The Fort Henry Trading Post™ generously displays their collection of unique and rare military items including air-sea survival equipment and gas masks for horses. The collection includes items from Germany, Japan, and Italy among others.

## Next Issue

Grumman S-2 Tracker, U.S. Navy Anti-Submarine Warfare plane



## Bell P-63A-6 Kingcobra

In last month's newsletter we referred to this Kingcobra as serial number 42-69021 and as a P-63A-6 model. It was, in fact, only painted as such when restored and is actually S/N 43-11223 which was a P-63C-5-BE model and was initially registered as NX90805 after the war.

Our P-63 Kingcobra, S/N 43-11223, was struck from the USAAF inventory on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1945 while at Altus, Oklahoma.

It is likely that 43-11223 was demilitarized while at Altus, Oklahoma before it was ferried to the sales depot at Ontario Cal-Aero Field (Chino), California. [Refer to last month's newsletter to learn more about the history of Cal-Aero]. The 'demilling' process typically involved removing all SME (Significant Military Equipment) such as M4 37mm cannon, 50 calibre machine guns, gunsights and bombsights as well as some other interior items such as radios, oxygen equipment, manuals, life rafts, fire extinguishers, and instruments.



## Resources

The following link is to a forum post on the Internet that is an excellent source of photographs and information about the development of the Bell P-63 Kingcobra. Pictures include development and testing, factory, prototypes, Russian pilots, and air racers. The others are of interest also.

[http://axis-and-allies-paintworks.com/e107\\_plugins/forum/forum\\_viewtopic.php?13736.post](http://axis-and-allies-paintworks.com/e107_plugins/forum/forum_viewtopic.php?13736.post)

<https://airwingmedia.com/downloads/p39-airacobra-p63-kingcobra/>

<http://www.warbirdregistry.org/p39-p63registry/p63-4269021.html>

<https://www.opshots.net/gallery2/index.php?page=photos&id=29827>

## Operating Hours

### Labor Day to Memorial Day

Open Saturday  
10:00 AM to 4:00 PM

### Memorial Day to Labor Day

Open 6 days a week - Monday thru Saturday

### Other days by Appointment Only

Contact: Joe Stephan  
864.569.3986

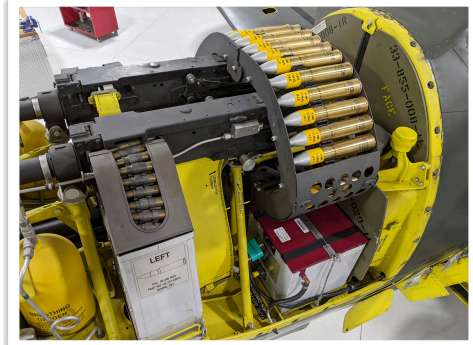
### To Schedule Events

Contact: Grant McClellan  
208.690.0896

Location: 400 Airport Rd, Rexburg, Idaho 83440

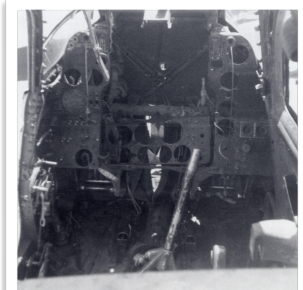
Phone: 208.359.5905

In 1946, Ken Kay purchased 43-11223 from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) intending to turn it into a pylon racer and had it ferried from the sales depot at Chino (Ontario), California to Van Nuys, California after registering it as NX90805. The ferry pilot, 18 year old Bill Lear, Jr., landed "hot" causing the main and nose tires to blow but maintained control without causing any other damage.



It appears that the P-63 was kept in flying condition at least through the beginning of 1947 according to several articles found on the Internet and provided herein (see side panels).

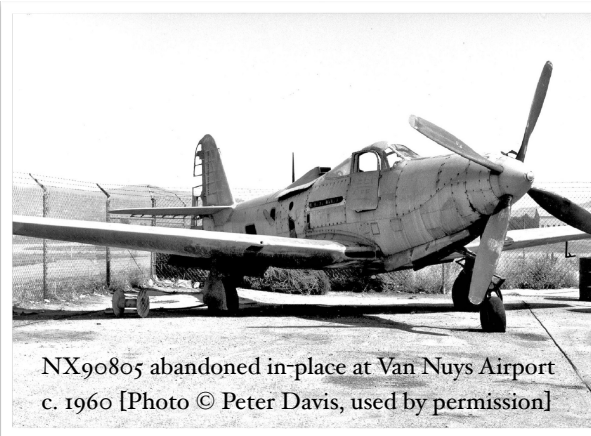
It's not known what happened to Ken Kay or why nothing was done with the plane but legend has it that he had found a P-51 to convert for racing and he just abandoned the P-63. It eventually occupied a spot beneath the control tower and remained there until the mid 1960s before being moved to another spot nearby when the tower was demolished. The aircraft suffered minor damage while abandoned in place including the removal of instruments.



Supposedly, in 1970, it was surrendered for tie-down fees and sold at auction. At that time, according to Civil Registration History, 43-11223 became the property of Ronald Hasz of Scott City, Kansas (1970-1992) and registered as N90805. There is a notation

“My grandfather lived in Van Nuys and we flew in there often from Merced. I always marveled at the derelict P-63A-6, 42-69021 there that owner Ken Kay originally had Bill Lear, Jr. bring in, and he and George Husband occasionally had flown it in 1947. It was sitting thoroughly neglected in plain view every time we were there in the early/mid 60’s. I got to climb around on it occasionally but my dad never took a photo. I loved that airplane but the family thought I was nuts. Then one day dad brought home a copy of AIRWAYS magazine, April 1969, Volume 3, No.4. On pages 52-53 these two photos appeared (no credits or author for the article) further begging at me to go get my Cobra! But alas, Frank Borman was far better financially equipped and today at least it resides in my home state of Idaho with John Bagley. Maybe there’s another out there somewhere...” *Lowell Thompson, Kellogg, Idaho 2007*

[Editor’s Note: Found on Warbird Information Exchange message board. Mr Thompson sadly passed away in 2013.]



NX90805 abandoned in-place at Van Nuys Airport c. 1960 [Photo © Peter Davis, used by permission]

that it was stored complete in hangar, Van Nuys, California from 1973-1992.

There is a picture of the aircraft, as it appeared in the

Thornton Aircraft hanger at Van Nuys, on page 31 of the Warbirds International magazine (September 2014) that shows it with the rudder restored, doors replaced, tires inflated and coated in gray primer — not an insignificant amount of work.

It was next reported to belong to Douglas W. Arnold of Warbirds of GB Ltd, Bournemouth, UK, from 1992 to 1995. His family put it up for sale after his death. The next entry was for World Jet Inc, Fort Lauderdale, Florida in 1995 as well as Ice Strike Corp, Dover, Delaware on November 27, 1995. These last two may indicate that ownership shifted to several brokers before the next significant owner was found.

Then, on November 27, 1995, 43-11223 was purchased by Frank Borman of Las Cruces, New Mexico. You may remember Colonel Borman (USAF) as Apollo-8 Mission Commander and Chairman, CEO of Easter Airlines.

The following June, Borman had 43-11223 trucked from Van Nuys to Square One Aviation Inc., in Chino, California for restoration.

It is interesting that the very field it last flew from had now become a principle location for warbird restoration.

Pictures show it tied down to a flatbed trailer in grey primer



Undergoing restoration at Square One Aviation at Cal-Aero Field hanger at Chino, California airport c. 1996



William (Bill) Lear Jr. was the son of inventor and entrepreneur William Powell Lear, founder of the Lear Jet Corporation, and was successful in his own right as a fighter pilot, entrepreneur and business executive.

A photograph of Bill Lear, Jr with George Husband about to fly the Kingcobra was found online while preparing this article. In the photo, a young Bill Lear is pictured standing outside the cockpit (wearing a B3 bomber jacket) while George Husband is seated inside wearing a leather A2 flight jacket and flying helmet. The photograph is owned by the Los Angeles Public Library and can be found in their online archives: <https://calisphere.org/item/511f3782613a147f6258abf19b349c99/>

Photograph caption dated January 31, 1947 reads, "George Husband (in cockpit), 19-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. Ernest G. Husband, 4542 Ledge ave., North Hollywood, here gets last minute instructions from 18-year-old Bill Lear Jr., also of North Hollywood, for his first 'check out' flight in a 'hot' plane--the Army's P-63 King Cobra."



and wings removed and rigged in an upright cradle for the trip.

The article in the September 2014 issue of Warbirds International goes into great detail describing the process of restoring this once abandoned P-63 Kingcobra to a 100% correct WWII fighter. Sadly, back issues are not available at this time.

So, after 18,000 man-hours of restoration, this magnificent P-63 flew again on February 11, 1998. It had been authentically restored, armament reinstalled, and painted with the same markings (i.e.,

42-69021) as when first accepted by the USAAF in 1944.✪



Col. Borman at Sun 'n Fun Fly-In 1998. © Jim Koepnick









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John Bagley at Oshkosh July 2017  
Photo by Doug Fisher