



Birthday Girl P-40 Kittyhawk 'Currawong' turns 70



Liz Needham and Frank Parker with P-40 Kittyhawk ZK-CAG at the Classic Fighters Omaka Airshow this year. This picture even made it onto One News courtesy of Jim Hickey.

The P-40 was valued for its excellent low-altitude performance, high rate of roll, high speed dive, and rugged construction. Later models carried an armament of six .50 calibre (12.5mm) Browning machine guns, which made it an excellent Army support aircraft. It was successfully operated in this role in all theatres throughout World War II, seeing extensive action in North Africa, the Pacific, Italy, Russia, and China-Burma-India.

The P-40 is powered by a V-12 Allison V-1710 engine, famed for its reliability and ease of maintenance. While the Allison is often compared with the Rolls Royce Merlin, official US Army policy prevented its development at the same rate as the Merlin. Nonetheless, the Allison powered the P-40, P-38 Lightning, P-39 Airacobra, and ground-attack versions of the P-51 Mustang throughout the war. Late model Allison was more powerful and required less maintenance than comparable Merlins.

Kittyhawk ZK-CAG, was built by Curtiss at Buffalo, New York, in May 1943 with the US Army Air Corps serial number 42-104730, and allocated under the Lease-Lend

THE 5th of May was a milestone for P-40 Kittyhawk CAG, as it turned over its 70th year.

The P-40 Kittyhawk was the last in a long line of 'Hawk' 'Pursuit' aircraft built by the Curtiss Aircraft Corporation, a company which traces its heritage to Glenn Curtiss who, along with the Wright Brothers, was one of America's Pioneers of Aviation. A development of the radial engine 'Hawk 75' of 1935, the P-40 was designed as a tough, close-support gunship for the US Army, a "street-fighter" that could survive a lot of damage and still get home at the end of the day.

In the late 1930s the United States Government did not see any need for a high-altitude air-superiority fighter such as the Spitfire, or a long-range naval fighter like Japan's Zero – after all, who could attack America? Accordingly, when the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 opened the shooting war in the Pacific, the P-40 was the front-line US Army Air Corp aircraft. Subsequently the P-40 played an important part in the aerial action in this theatre. Milne Bay in New Guinea and Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands were two notable battles which marked the end of Japanese expansionism in the Pacific.



Liz Needham with finger on the trigger, fire from the barrells and spent cartridges pouring from the six .50 calibre Browning M-2 machine guns.



Model: P40N, Serial #: AC42-104730, Class: Pursuit, Date Delivered: 5-5-43.



CAG has appeared at all the major NZ airshows since 2000, often in the company of P-40 E ZK-RMH.



Frank and Liz (in the front) on the 70th anniversary flight for P-40 Kittyhawk CAG.



Printed in black and white, this could be from WWII, but the image with guns blazing was taken by Gavin Conroy at Warbirds Over Wanaka in 2008.

Program to the Royal Australian Air Force, where it was 'taken on strength' on August 1943 at 2 Air Depot, Richmond (Sydney), and re-numbered A29-448. It was then allocated on 25th August to 75 Squadron at Turnbull Field, Milne Bay, and continued for most of its service life with 75 Sqn in the New Guinea theatre of operations. Finally, it was allotted to 78 Sqn at Tadj (New Guinea) but was soon written-off (in May 1944) as a result of damage sustained in a gear up landing after a total electrical failure.

The remains of A29-448 were recovered from Tadj by Charles Darby in 1973 and in the 1990s were rebuilt by Pioneer Aero in Auckland for Charles and co-owner Garth Hogan, who ensured it was restored in the original colours it carried in New Guinea 65 years ago. The only 'licence' is the Currawong nose art which is based on 75 Squadron's magpie emblem, with "Currawong" being the magpie's name in some aboriginal dialects. Despite extensive research no information exists as to any name or nose art the aircraft may have carried in WWII.

After restoration, Currawong's first airshow appearance was at Warbirds over Wanaka in 2000, and since that time it has appeared at all of the major air displays in New Zealand. For recent Wanaka Airshows the aircraft has been fitted with its original armament of six "live" .50 cal (12.5 mm) Browning M-2 machine guns and demonstrated gun-firing strafing attacks with blank rounds, a world-wide first for any airshow.

For the past two years co owner Liz Needham has flown CAG, often in company with P-40 E ZK-RMH at airshows throughout New Zealand. It was fitting that Liz took CAG for a 'spin' on

Sunday 5th May, 70 years after the data plate stamp 5/5/43. The day dawned fine, just right for a mid morning sortie, however just prior to start-up a menacing shower approached Ardmore from the north necessitating a quick return to the hangar. After a 30 minute wait conditions improved; now or never.

Take off was from vector 03, followed by the customary overhead circuit then out to the training area. Conditions precluded a full suite of aerobatics; however an aileron roll was achieved, then back to the airfield for a faultless landing onto 03. By the time the aircraft was back in the hangar the weather had closed in for good; nothing better to do than celebrate the occasion with friends at the Warbirds Bar – Happy Birthday 'Charlie Alfa Golf'.

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