

AirCorps Aviation FLYING TO SUCCESS

by Daniel Damas

As kids, we all probably built model airplanes to display in our rooms or we launched model rockets into the sky as far as the eye can see. As we grew older, perhaps we were able to take our love of flying and focus it on radio controlled models. As adults, some of us even made flying our full-time job.

In May of 2011, four people pursued their passion for flight and embarked on something unique. The four of them had grown up flying models and their passion led them to find ways to get involved in the aviation industry from an early age.

These four individuals combined their love for flying and their passion for vintage World War II (WWII) fighters and turned it into a Minnesota business. That is when AirCorps Aviation was born with one goal: to be the best WWII fighter restoration company in the world. This team started a company, based in Bemidji, Minnesota, that had a backlog of business before they even opened their doors.

Dan Matejcek is one of the four owners. He loves to fly and practice the art and science of manufacturing. Matejcek is a graduate of North Dakota State College of Science where he learned about manufacturing and machine tooling. He was able to put his skills to use right away working on old airplanes in Wahpeton, North Dakota. Matejcek readily admits that the history of these old planes is cool but it's not his spark. His real passion is focused on programming and running a mill. Matejcek is fascinated with taking an old blue print or old part and making it into a replacement part to the same vintage specifications as the original.

Restoring Beauty

AirCorps Aviation's focus is on restoration, not rebuilding. For example, when a Warbird is done and cannot be used anymore, AirCorps Aviation restores it back to its original condition—as it appears the day it rolled off the assembly line back in the 1940s.



Below: A restored World War II fighter from AirCorps Aviation.

This is their specialty: the ability to make the plane authentic in every detail. From the aluminum parts having the original Alcoa 24S-T imprint on it, to the zinc chromate primer in either yellow or green on the appropriate parts—no detail is spared. This level of detail is very thorough. Consider parts like the ribs in the wings that you will never see, to custom made hydraulic fittings, to AC811 series standards of the day, rather than the AN series of today. All are restored to match the original parts.

Their attention to detail has not gone unnoticed. Their efforts on the P51-D Twilight Tear won Grand Champion at the EAA Airventure and earned AirCorps Aviation a Golden Wrench award for its participation in the restoration. When a customer wants the best P51 Mustang restoration company, there's no doubt they've found it at AirCorps Aviation.

The Future


Work is plentiful. Matejcek mentioned they have plenty of work on the books for the foreseeable future. The future looks bright for AirCorps Aviation, but there are some challenges ahead, too. For instance, finding parts is getting harder for these vintage airplanes.

AirCorps Aviation has developed their own system to track parts and handle bills of materials in a more flexible way. Every restoration is different, so flexibility is key. AirCorps Aviation knows the day is

coming when it will not be able to find a part needed, in addition to not knowing how to produce the part. It's important for AirCorps Aviation to continually hone their creative manufacturing skills.

Incredible Discipline

Matejcek indicated more than once that the people who designed and built these old planes were very smart and knew how to do very unique things. Some of that "how-to" knowledge is not on the prints, so the AirCorps Aviation team needs to solve these puzzles using modern technology—to honor the legacy of the ingenuity of the past to make authentic parts. This commitment to problem solving is fueled by their passion for authenticity.

In addition to their capabilities and expertise, AirCorps Aviation also shows incredible discipline. Their focus is to not only grow into a strong company, but also to keep a sharp focus on WWII era fighters. It's truly amazing to consider how machines that were built and pushed to the limit, almost 70 years ago, are being re-made right here in Minnesota, to continue working as a flying piece of history. 



DANIEL DAMAS is with Plastics International. He can be reached at DanD@plasticsintl.com.