

## K-28 NAVY BLIMP CAR RESTORATION DECLARED COMPLETE

After 22 ½ years on the K-28 project, crew chief Russ Magnuson decided to withdraw from the WWII Navy blimp car restoration effort around Christmas 2015. It was becoming difficult for 87-year-old Russ to climb the 14-foot ladder to reach the top of the car, or to scoot around on the creeper underneath the hull, as he had right up to last year. Rather than continue without Russ's direct involvement, the project team decided that the restoration, about 98-percent complete, could come to an end.

There were very few potential restoration tasks left anyway. The two major missing blimp components for which good documentation is available are the landing gear strut and the bomb bay doors. In theory these could be fabricated from scratch, but they are at the bottom of the car and would not be visible to the public. Rather than continue construction for many more months, the team felt that it was time to clean up the area and prepare for formal visitor displays.

After launching the project in May 1993, Russ spent an estimated 40,000 hours documenting, cleaning, designing, drawing, and constructing, both at NEAM and at home, not counting travel time. He supervised more than 30 volunteer helpers over the years, and he explained the history of Navy K-class blimps to countless Museum visitors. He saved the K-28, the last remaining WWII Navy blimp car, from the scrap heap, and he turned it into one of the Museum's premier attractions.

The fall of 2015 saw the last big visible additions to K-28, with the installation of the beautiful engine cowlings. These were entirely NEAM-built, by Tom Palshaw, Al Pereira, Don Scroggs, and Russ. Just about all the other projects, inside the K-28 and out, had been completed by then: wonderfully-restored P&W R-1340-AN-2 engines, the .50-caliber machine gun turret, the replica electronics and military equipment at all 10 crew stations, and the interior lighting which dramatically highlights all the fine details. As a final personal project, Russ restored a non-Navy item, the 840-fuse panel which Goodyear had left in the K-28 when it donated the car to NEAM in 1980. With the help of John Craggs and Don Scroggs, Russ preserved that item as a reminder of K-28's short postwar career as Goodyear's "Puritan II" advertising blimp.

Thus at the end of 2015 the K-28 project was ready to enter a new phase. The first thing on the list was to identify, sort, and dispose of thousands of parts, tools, raw materials, fixtures, documents and photographs collected over 22+ years. Identifiable K-28 and Goodyear artifacts were given over to Kim Jones and Bob Vozzola for cold storage. Some tools and parts were given to the Restoration Hangar, and a lot of metal was sent out for recycling. Eventually the K-28's corner of the Civilian Hangar, which had been a restoration facility since 1993, was clean.

The current plan is to turn that area into a Lighter-Than-Air display. The large R-101 dirigible display and its surroundings will be moved across the Civilian Hangar to the corner behind the K-28. The K-28 will be moved a few feet away from the walls to allow visitors to walk around it on all sides. Professional-quality display materials will be created to tell the story of Navy blimps and the K-28 restoration. A six-foot scale model K-class blimp is planned, to show the relative size of the blimp car to the complete blimp. A painted backdrop might simulate the view of the sky and the ocean below, as the blimp hovers over a WWII Atlantic convoy. And finally the Craftsmen will design and construct raised viewing platforms so visitors

can walk up and look inside the large starboard-side windows of the K-28, to see all the restoration details inside.

In the meantime, a few temporary display items have been set up along the wall, and the chains have been moved a little to allow visitors to get closer to the K-28's starboard side. We have already seen many visitors spend extra time in that space, contemplating the K-28 before moving on to the Gee Bee. Also, Don Young has spent a few months re-polishing the K-28's entire aluminum skin, with spectacular results.

Finally, there is a filing cabinet and multiple shelves full of documentation about the K-28 restoration and Navy LTA in general. There are plans and drawings by Russ, blimp manuals, LTA articles, Goodyear engineering drawings on microfilm, and thousands of photos which Russ took from 1993 to 2015. We hope this material can find a home somewhere, and perhaps be a resource for researchers.

George Diemer

Restoration volunteer"

--- For a cover photo, Don has some nice pictures taken from up on a ladder, so that may be something we can use. It would be something like this, only better:



In the body of the article I thought we might place a couple of smaller photos, such as:

Here is a shot of Russ and Don Scroggs and the new cowling in the fall of 2015.



Or here is a shot of Don Young polishing in February 2016:



Or here is a shot of the Russ and Dick Kyte in 1996, after cleaning and painting the fuel tanks:



There are thousands of restoration photos to choose from.

Thanks,  
George