



# Vought Aircraft Heritage Foundation F6U-1 Restoration in Photographs

## The Restoration of Vought Pirate Number 2



F6U-1

PIRATE

JET FIGHTER

NAVY



# Vought Aircraft Heritage Foundation

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### **Pirate Fighter leads VOUGHT into jet age**

By Art Schoeni (Vought Photographer and Historian)

**One in a Series** The single men all lived in tarpaper shacks on the windswept desert. Heat from pot-bellied stoves set in the middle of the building was poor. The nearest toilet and shower facilities were across the street, not a popular location on cold winter mornings.

A combat report from the war zone? Nope, just how 50 men lived when they took the first XF6U-1 jet Pirate fighter to Muroc Dry Lakebed, Calif., in October, 1946, for its first flight. The Pirate was Vought's first jet airplane and it was flown from Stratford, Conn., factory to Muroc in a Fairchild C-119 to begin its test program.

About the time the Pirate finished its Muroc (now Edwards AFB) tests the XF-86 Sabre was making its first flights there. So were the Northrop XB-35 Flying Wing and the Bell X-1 rocket aircraft. Henry C. Nissen was in charge of the test program, with Luther Boyer as flight test engineer.

The jet Pirate started out as a twin-engine propellered carrier fighter with R-2800-E engines. The Navy wanted a jet fighter so the company submitted a V-340 proposal. It received a contract award on Dec. 24, 1944 while the war still going on.

Three experimental Pirates were built with J-34-WE-22 engine of 3,000 pounds thrust. Compare this to the 15,000 pounds thrust jet engine in the A-7E Corsair II. The jet engine was so light two men could lift it.

Underpowered as it was, the Pirate with its blunt nose and straight wings at first was under 500 miles per hour, less than the F4U-5 Corsair which topped that mark in a Patuxent test flight. The XF6U-1 weighed 9,000 pounds, less than half that of an A-7.

At Muroc, Edward Owens, Vought's chief test pilot, made the first flight in the experimental airplane on Oct. 2, 1946. The company produced 30 F6U-1s with the J-34-WE-30A engine of 3,200-pounds thrust.

To boost the speed, the new solar afterburner was added in 1948, upping thrust to 4,200 pounds. So unsure were flight line men about how the burner would work they viewed its first operations at Patuxent from a tent with a window in it, located some 50 yards away.

First production F6U flight was made by Robert Baker at Stratford on Oct. 2, 1948. That year at Patuxent, Paul Thayer landed a Pirate on a golf course when his aircraft had an engine failure caused by a major control system malfunction. He walked away from that crash landing unhurt.

The Vought plant moved to Dallas during the F6U and F7U production programs. Because of the then-short runways at NAS Dallas, the disassembled F6Us were trucked to Ardmore, reassembled and flown there. The F7Us was first flown at Carswell AFB and later from Ardmore.

The Pirate was the first airplane to use the new Metalite skin, invented by Vought for greater strength and lightness. It was a core of balsa wood sandwiched between skins of aluminum.

The F6U never reached Navy fleet squadron use. The Navy put the emphasis on the Cutlass and the Pirates ended up at Naval air stations and training centers for mechanic training.



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Suddenly, in 1948, Chance Vought astounded industry by announcing that it was moving to Texas, and taking with it millions of pounds of equipment and 1500 of its key employees, many of whom had been born and raised in New England.

Toward the end of the move, when the F6U-1 program was nearing completion in Stratford, the trucks were constantly busy hauling subassemblies, and even complete airplanes. The first truck in the caravan arrived in Dallas the first week in January 1949 with a center section wing and a front section fuselage and, thereafter, additional shipments arrived in Dallas at the rate of one plane a week.

Canvas-wrapped, without wing tips or tail surfaces; these airplanes were 24 feet wide, taking up two lanes of a highway, and were 48 feet long and 13 feet high. Special permits had to be obtained from each state through which the Pirate traveled. Each state and county provided police escorts for the valuable and bulky cargo. The Pirate traveled in a convoy with a car driving in advance to notify highway police of the next county of its approach and a truck filled with fuselage sections followed to guard the plane from the rear.

That is how the first F6Us arrived at Vought's new Texas plant in Grand Prairie. The plane in the photo is believed to be F6U number 2.





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Vought F6U-1, USN Serial number 122479 was the 2nd production airplane. It was a flight test aircraft which ended its career in the desert of Socorro, New Mexico as a ground subject for explosive charge cutting development. The shattered airframe then found its way to the Connecticut Air Museum where some restoration on the vertical tail was accomplished. Number 479 was donated to the Vought Aircraft Heritage Foundation in early 2002 and arrived at VAHF in October of that year. It is the only known survivor of a batch of 30 that were fabricated from 1948 to 1949.

## **Note of Interest**

The Vought test pilot on the F6U program was Paul Thayer. Toward the end of the restoration of Pirate number 2, Paul Thayer looked at it, touched it, glared at it, smiled and was heard to say “You tried to kill me twice.” Paul Thayer was 90 years young.



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The following Vought retirees restored the F6U-1 Pirate:

“	Wade Anderson	“	Chuck Lindly
“	Huey Barrilleaux	“	Harold Lindsey
“	Cathie Barrington	“	Hank Merbler
“	Don Branton	“	Ab Miller
“	Bobby Brown	“	Dave Morse
“	Harvey Brown	“	Billy Newberry
“	Stan Bullard	“	Burt Noble
“	Ray Dickey	“	Ted Phelps
“	Joe Engle	“	Bob Rainey
“	Bob Essler	“	Richard Roberson
“	Jerry Fischer	“	Richard Sheaner
“	Kelly Fling	“	Dillon Smith
“	Jim Gathings	“	Charles Stalcup
“	Earl Hastings	“	Bob Szabados
“	Jim Hill	“	Bob Turney
“	John Huffman	“	Wayne Vaughn
“	Jim Kaufmann	“	Phillip Wacaster
“	Carl Klapprott	“	Wat Watkins
“	Frank Laubenthal	“	Harold Widmann
		“	Richard Win

## Photographs by:

- “ Billy Newberry
- “ Roger Stites

## Book by:

- “ Roger Stites
- “ John Jipp



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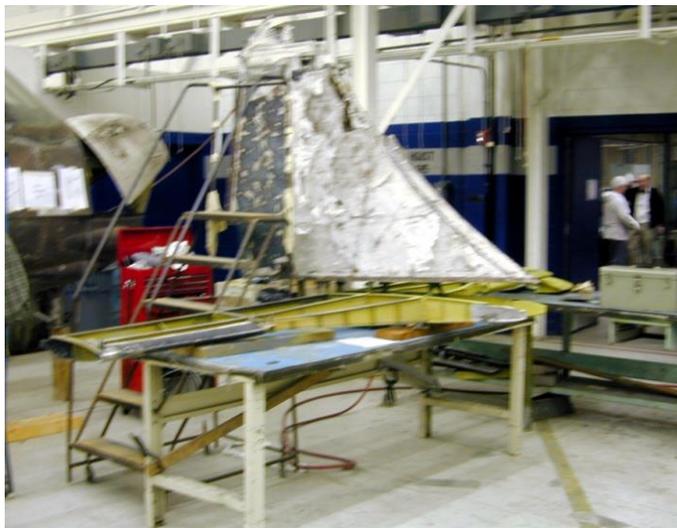
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The remaining parts of the aircraft were set up so work could begin.

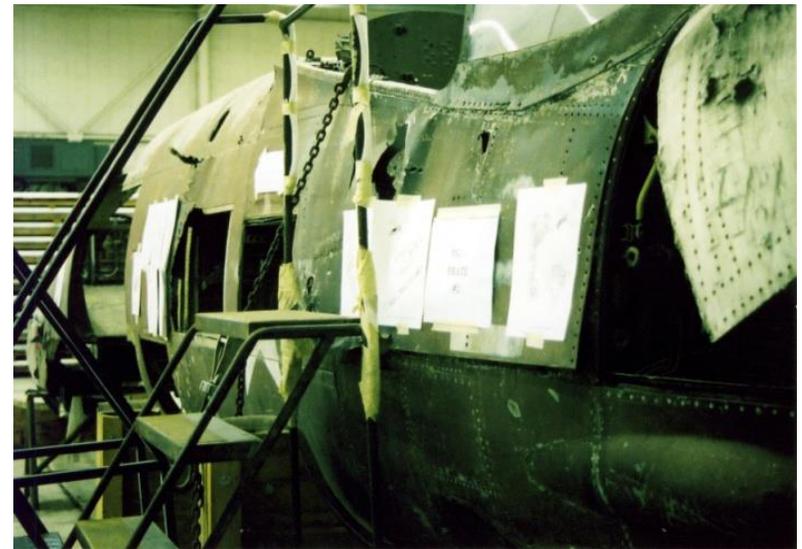


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Work began in 2002.

The first parts finished were the vertical and horizontal tail assembly and some skin panels.

After a coating of primer paint, more skin was repaired and the two parts of the fuselage were put back together.

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Other features including the canopy, gun ports and other missing parts fabrication was started.





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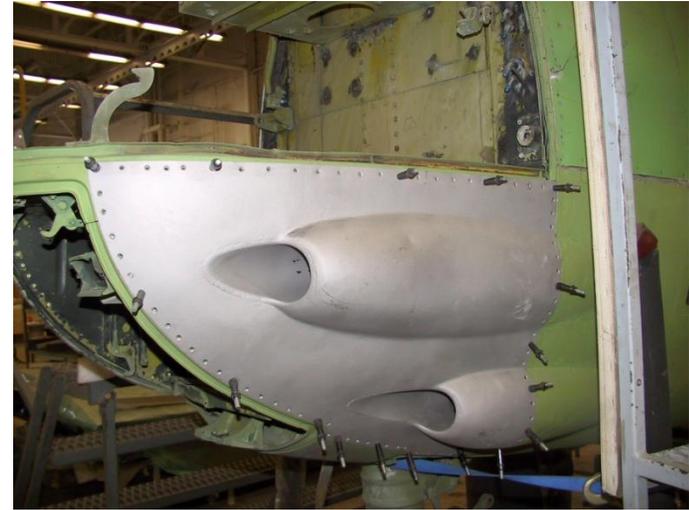


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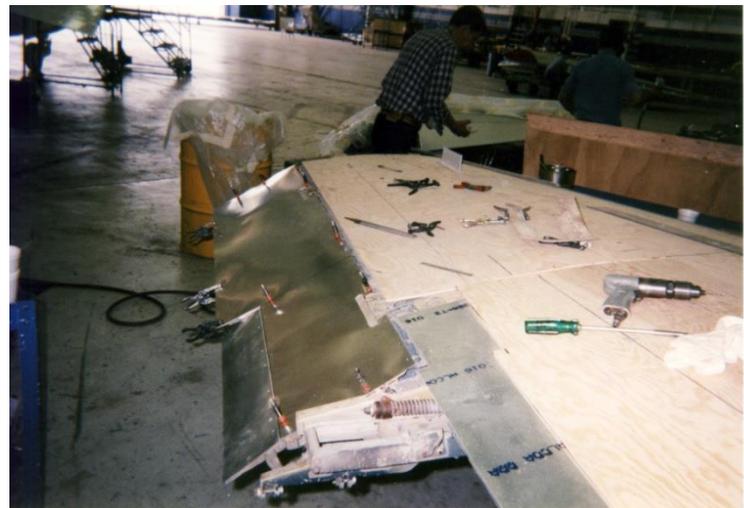
The plane came with only one wing, in as bad a shape as the fuselage, and no wing box or landing gear.

This being the only known F6U to still exist, these missing parts also had to be fabricated by the retirees.





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After nine years of dedicated work, just two days a week, the plane was restored to its original shape.

It got another coat of primer paint and a final sanding and inspection. Then it received its signature Vought blue paint job and decals.

Another group of retirees worked on the cockpit as the rest of the plane was being restored.

Work was finished 2011.





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- “ The F6U-1 number 2 was finished Nov./2011.
- “ The restoration was completed by the retirees of the Vought Aircraft Heritage Foundation, a part of the Vought Aircraft Industries Retirees Club.  
[www.vought.com/heritage](http://www.vought.com/heritage)
- “ This beautiful museum piece was moved during February 2012 to the National Museum of Naval Aviation in Pensacola Florida.  
[www.navalaviationmuseum.org](http://www.navalaviationmuseum.org)