Tinsmith makes biplanes out of recycled soda cans

Nick Cooney, right, stands with his crew in 1945.

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Fortunately, if you want to call it that, we found them first,” Cooney said.

It was a small convoy of six or seven Japanese ships, including a couple of Japanese destroyer escort ships. Fighters were up high, he said. “We came up flying with rockets ahead of us,” Cooney said. “We were out on the fringe and we were coming in from both sides and we hit a couple of the Japanese ships.”

Just in case the worst happened, Cooney had written a “last letter” about what he did during the war. He had put it in his locker. After the war, Cooney returned to Philadelphia and met a “beautiful girl from West Philadelphia.” They were married in July 1946. “It was always a joke in our house whereby I said ‘I spent three years in World War II and 67 in World War III,” he said.

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By JACK FICHTER

Cape May Star and Wave

Sanflippo said he started making airplanes from soda cans as a hobby. He said he did not have a design with which to work.

“I sort of made it myself,” he said. “The trick is in the propeller. Each blade of the propeller is designed to a certain angle so it spins well in the wind he said. The propeller, which takes an hour to make, has a bearing inside, Sanflippo said.

He said different size cans — such as 12 ounces, 22 ounces and 24 ounces — make different-size airplanes.

With the public activity involved in recycling, Sanflippo said it is getting harder to find cans. He said he does not always have enough cans available.

“We do all right on the soda cans,” Sanflippo said.

Friends help him locate cans, which he balances — Sanflippo said. Once he had 20,000 cans in a remaining soda in the can, he said.

Soda cans can be hung outside the Naval Air Station Wildwood Aviation Museum, Cooney said. “Our force” hung from strings of fishing line, he said, helping keep the B-24 flying. “Dr. Pepper.”

The Gloucester Township resident was selling his old art studio and airplane inside the big hangar during the 18th annual AirFest last week at the museum.

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Landing gear for the planes are made of coal hanger struts and bottle cap truss. It takes five cans to make the wings of the plane, Sanflippo said. He said he does not always have enough cans available.

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