

# North American P-51 Mustang

Generally considered the best fighter of WWII

"The day I saw Mustangs over Berlin, I knew the jig was up." Hermann Goering

15,100 planes produced. P-51D specs: 440 MPH, six 50 caliber machine guns

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North American Aviation originally designed the Mustang in response to a British specification. They agreed to produce the first prototype only 4 months after signing the contract in April 1940. By the end of 1941 North American had delivered the first Mustang to England for test flights. These first Mustangs were powered by the Allison V-1710 engine, a good engine, but one which didn't operate well at high altitudes.

In April, 1942, a British test pilot, Ronald Harker, flew the Mustang and was very impressed by it. He suggested that the new plane would be a natural fit with the Rolls Royce Merlin 60-series engine, well-suited to high altitudes. At the prodding of Major Thomas Hitchcock, the Americans began working along the same lines (using the Packard license-built version of the Merlin), and the first Merlin-equipped Mustang, the P-51B, flew in November, 1942. The results were impressive, to say

the least. At 30,000 feet, the improved Mustang reached 440 MPH, almost **100 MPH faster** than the Allison-equipped Mustang at that altitude.

Both [Robert Goebel](#) and [Bud Anderson](#) flew Mustangs. Their comments follow.

### **Bob Goebel on the P-51:**

Robert Goebel flew Mustangs with the 31st Fighter Group, based at San Severo, Italy, in the MTO (Mediterranean Theater of Operations). Like Bud Anderson, he had flown P-39s earlier on. At San Severo in Spring 1944, he got his first crack at the P-51:

*We soon found out that the P-51 Mustang was indeed a different breed of airplane. It was fast, for one thing. ... The P-51 was redlined at 505 and, though it was no Spitfire, its turning ability wasn't bad at all - especially if you sneaked down 10 degrees of flaps. It was pretty good in the climbing department too, and accelerated very fast in a dive. But the thing that really set the Mustang apart from any other fighter, friend or foe, was its range. With a 75-gallon tank slung under each wing, it could perform the unheard-of: It could fly **six-hour** missions.*

*Physically, it was pleasing to the eye and looked fast, even sitting on the ground. Power was provided by a V-1650 Rolls-Royce Merlin engine built under license in the States by Packard, the luxury automobile company. The V-1650 was a fine engine and could be taken up to 61 inches of manifold pressure at 3,000 RPM for take-off or, if needed in combat, 67 inches for up to five minutes in Emergency Power. Normally aspirated engines tended to run out of power as altitude increased, usually between 15,000 and 20,000 feet. The P-51 had a two-stage blower in the induction system that was controlled automatically with a barometric switch. Around 17,000 feet, when the throttle had been advanced almost all the way forward just to maintain normal cruise, the blower would kick into high, the manifold pressure would jump up, and the climb could be continued to 30,000 feet. The P-51 could be taken a lot higher than that, but above 30,000 feet the power was way down and the controls had to be handled gingerly.*

quoted from [Mustang Ace](#) available at Amazon.com

### **Bud Anderson on the P-51:**

When Bud Anderson arrived at Raydon Wood in England, with the 357th Fighter Group, he was introduced to the Mustang, which was a lot different from the P-39. The Mustang was a tail-dragger with a long nose blocking the pilot's forward view, requiring him to make sweeping "S" turns to see where he was going. The P-51 was a lot more powerful, and had a big four-blade paddle propeller. Take-offs and landing were a bit tricky, but in the air, the Mustang:

*lit was pleasant and forgiving to fly. Best of all, it went like Hell. The Merlin had great gobs of power, and was equally at home high or low, thanks to a two-stage, two-speed supercharger. The Mustang carried fuel enough to pursue and destroy the enemy once you'd flown to the target, and it could turn on a dime. It was crucial to keep it trim but, as we gained experience with the plane, that became automatic. We sensed it was special, even before we measured it against what the enemy pilots were flying.*

quoted from [To Fly and Fight, Memoirs of a Triple Ace, by Clarence 'Bud' Anderson](#)

The Mustang's range and combat capabilities permitted it to escort the heavy USAAF bombers (B-17s mostly) on massive daylight bombing raids over Germany. Some have argued that it was a "war-winning" weapon. It certainly was a decisive factor in the aerial Battle of Germany. After World War

Two, the Mustang continued to serve with the USAF and other Western air forces, including distinguished service in the Korean War.

## **Mustang Chronology**

### **June '40 - British Request**

In the Spring of 1940, the British Purchasing Commission, headed by Sir Henry Self, visiting the U.S. asked Dutch Kindelberger, head of North American Aviation, to build Curtiss-designed P-40's for them. While his company had never built a fighter, Kindelberger's designers, led by Edgar Schmued had started design work on a modern fighter. Already, in 1940, the Curtiss P-40 and the Bell P-39 were inferior to aircraft being flown by Germany and Britain. Kindelberger offered to design and build the first prototype of the new fighter in 120 days. They signed the contract for 300 of the aircraft in late May.

The new fighter incorporated many of the latest developments in aeronautics, notably the laminar flow wing, a wing that was relatively symmetrical and offered less drag at high speed. The wings were designed to be easy to manufacture, with only two spars. As specified by the British requirement, the new airplane, designated the **NA-73X**, employed an in-line engine; the Allison V-1710 fit the bill, although it lacked a turbosupercharger for high-altitude performance. The main wheels were set twelve feet apart, for good stability on landing.

In the original design, the British required eight machine guns: four .30 caliber and four .50 caliber. Ultimately, most Mustangs would carry the usual American weaponry of six .50 caliber Brownings. It carried twice as much internal fuel as a Spitfire, 180 gallons in self-sealing wing tanks.

102 days after contract signing, in Sept. 1940, the prototype **NA-73X** rolled out. Apparently no one quibbled over the fact that it didn't have an engine, nor brakes, nor paint, nor actual gun mounts.

### **Oct. '40 - Flight of NA-73X Prototype**

### **Oct. '41 - Mustang Mark I Reaches Britain**

While North American (NAA) had developed the prototype quickly, the first stage of production moved along more slowly. The first **NA-73** production aircraft did not fly until April 23, 1941, six months after **NA-73X**. It carried no weapons and was kept by NAA for testing and development. The second production airplane (armed with four .30's and four .50's) arrived in Liverpool in October, 1941 - a year after the prototype's first flight.

Nonetheless, the Mustang was so promising that in late 1941 the RAF ordered another 300 and the USAAF 150. As the exigencies of war demanded, 93 of these 150 (factory designated **NA-91**) ended up in British service, as **Mustang IA**'s, equipped with four 20mm cannon. The remaining 57, equipped with four .50 caliber machine guns, and known as **P-51**'s, ended up in US service.

### **Feb. '42 - Tactical Recon: No. 26 Sqn Issued Mark I's**

These early Allison-powered Mustangs were fast, strongly constructed, had a long range, and packed a wallop with their eight guns. But their poor high-altitude performance relegated them to the low-level tactical reconnaissance role with British Army Cooperation Command (ACC). Outfitted with a K24 camera behind the pilot, the Mark I Mustangs could photograph enemy dispositions, provide ground support, and fight their way out of a jam. And they could do so better than the ACC's existing

Tomahawks and Lysanders. By summer 1942, 15 RAF squadrons were flying the Mark I, photographing invasion targets, shooting up trains, barge-busting, and probing German defenses.

### July '42 - First Long Range Recon Mission

On July 27, sixteen RAF Mustangs undertook a long-range reconnaissance mission, photographing the Dortmund-Ems Canal.

### Aug. '42 - Dieppe Raid

The "reconnaissance in force" on August 19 gained little for the Allies, except the expensive and bloody lesson in how tough the German defenses were, both on the ground and in the air. The raid, Operation *Jubilee*, introduced the Typhoon and the Spitfire Mk. IX, and marked the first Mustang aerial victory. Four Mustang squadrons, No. 26, 239, 400, and 414, provided tactical recon for the ground troops.



Flight Officer Hollis "Holly" Hills, an American serving with No. 414 Sqn of the RCAF, took off from Gatwick in the pre-dawn darkness, as "weaver" (wingman) to Flt. Lt. Freddie Clarke. Flying at wavetop level, the glow from the searchlights and AA fire at Dieppe permitted him to stay with his leader. Once over the target, they were promptly separated; both returned safely. On the second mission that morning, they saw a huge dogfight filling the sky over Dieppe, and Hills spotted four Fw 190s off to their right. With his radio out and unaware of the German fighters, Flt. Lt. Clarke left himself open and

was hit. Then Hollis caught one of the FW's with a deflection burst. It started smoking and flaming, then the canopy popped off. Hollis fired again, and the plane fell to ground. He headed for home, shepherding Clarke as he went, dueling another Fw 190 for miles. In his fight with the Fw's, he lost sight of Clarke. After that, Hollis flew home uneventfully, to a dinner made rather somber by Clarke's apparent loss. But next morning, Clarke re-appeared over Hollis' bunk, smelling of seaweed; he had ditched off Dieppe and been rescued. He had witnessed and could officially confirm Hollis' victory over the Focke-Wulf, the first of many aerial victories for the Mustang. And Clarke had the dubious honor of being the first combat Mustang to be shot down in the war by the Germans.

Read more about Clarke's and Hills' mission in this [email from Clarke's son](#).

[Mustang Aces of the Ninth and Fifteenth Air Forces and the RAF](#) tells more about Dieppe and the RAF's use of the Mustang.

### Oct. '42 - Merlin Powered Mustang

As early as May, 1942, Ronald Harker, a Rolls Royce test pilot, first recommended mating the Mustang airframe to the Merlin engine, an idea which would transform the P-51 into a decisive weapon, capable of escorting American bombers all the way to Berlin. Harker test-flew an RAF Mustang on April 30, 1942, and noted that it was 30 MPH faster than the Spitfire Mk V and had almost double the range. Harker's memo recommending the Merlin-Mustang combination (in which he erroneously identified Edgar Schmued as a former Messerschmitt employee) got the attention of Rolls Royce management, who borrowed five RAF Mustangs to test the idea. The British flight-tested the Mustang X in October, and found that the experimental craft significantly out-performed the Allison at high altitudes, generating 200 more horsepower at 20,000 feet and almost 500 more HP at 30,000 feet. While the British research was valuable, the American Merlin Mustang program proceeded almost independently.

In the summer of 1942, Packard Motors was negotiating with Rolls Royce to license-build the Merlin engine at its Detroit plant. Learning of Rolls Royce' Merlin-Mustang plans, Major Thomas Hitchcock, the American military attache in London, and others, pushed for the development of a Mustang powered by the Packard-built Merlin. Authorized in July, 1942, North American began its Merlin Mustang development in August.

The **XP-51B** included these changes:

- a Packard Merlin engine, instead of the Allison V-1710
- a four-bladed propeller
- stronger underwing racks
- a strengthened airframe
- a relocated carburetor air intake, from above to below the nose, **as shown below**



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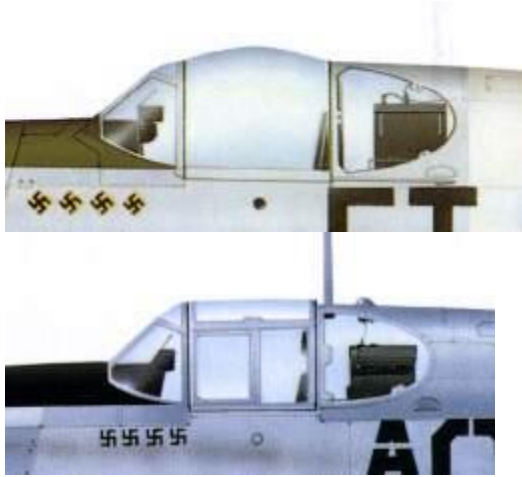
- an intercooler radiator
- larger ducts and doors for the radiator system
- a deeper scoop under the rear fuselage
- removal of the nose-mounted guns - (see illustration above)

First flown on November 30, 1942, the **XP-51B**'s performance exceeded the engineers' expectations. At 29,800 feet, it made 440 MPH in level flight, 100 MPH better than the Allison models.

The USAAF, desperately needing a long-range bomber escort, contracted for 2200 **P-51B**'s. North American geared up for Mustang production, moving the B-25 program to Kansas City, dedicating the Inglewood plant to the Mustang, and expanding the Dallas plant for the Mustang (Dallas-built versions of the **-B** model were designated **P-51C**). **P-51B**'s began rolling out of Inglewood in May, 1943; eventually 1,990 of the **-B** models would be made. The first of 1,750 **P-51C**'s produced at Dallas flew in August.

After production of the B/C model began, three more changes appeared:

- an up-rated Packard Merlin engine, the 1650-7 replacing the 1650-3, for a small increase in HP
- an 85 gallon fuel tank installed behind the pilot, giving critically longer reach, but moving the center of gravity aft, thus reducing directional stability until most of the fuel was consumed
- the bulbous Malcolm hood, giving much better all-around visibility (a field modification), **as shown below**



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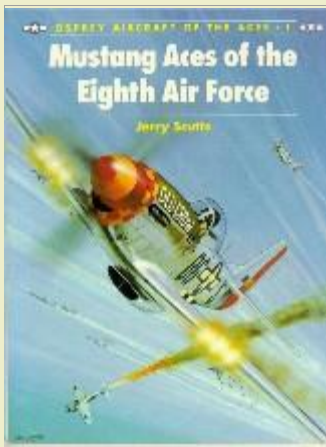
### June '43 - A-36's with USAAF in MTO, Sicily

The first U.S. unit to fly the Mustang in combat was the Morocco-based 154th Observation Squadron, which used 35 P-51-2NA's for a few weeks in April-May, 1943.

300 A-36A's (a variant of the Mustang known as "Apache" and "Invader") made a larger impact, when the 27th and 86th Bombardment Groups began flying them. In June, 1943, the 27th BG flew missions against Pantelleria, in the build-up for the Sicily invasion. Dive bombing was a challenge, the recommended technique being a dive from 8,000 - 10,000 feet at 90 degrees, with dive brakes extended to keep speed below 400 MPH. At 3,000 feet, the pilot dropped two 500-pound bombs and pulled out at 1,500 feet. With this extended straight-in bomb run, they were vulnerable to anti-aircraft fire.

German and Italian fighters engaged also engaged them. One A-36 pilot, Lt. Mike Russo of the 27th BG, made ace, the only man to do so while flying an Allison-powered Mustang. He counted four different types among his five aerial victories: two Fw-190's, a Bf-109, a Ju-52, and a Fieseler Storch.

The 27th and 86th were reduced to three squadrons each in September, due to the heavy losses they had incurred. As the Italian campaign progressed, they increasingly used strafing and glide bombing tactics, which reduced their losses to flak. In early 1944, both Groups transitioned to P-47's and turned over their A-36's for training.



### Mustang Aces of the Eighth Air Force, by Jerry Scutts

The first in Osprey's "Aircraft of the Aces" series, 96 pages, 60 detailed color illustrations of Mustangs (great for modelers), dozens of original B&W photos from WWII, and a table showing "Top Aces of the Eighth - Group by Group." The color plates are a real treat, because the 8AF allowed such colorful unit color schemes as well as nose art.

Featured planes include "Old Crow," "Big Beautiful Doll," "Glamorous Glen," "The Hun Hunter from Texas," and Preddy's "Cripes A' Mighty" in the bold colors of the "Blue-Nosed Bastards of Bodney".

[Read a Review of 'Mustang Aces of the Eighth Air Force' at Amazon.com](#)

## Service in the ETO, Table of Aces, and Post-War

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### Dec. '43 - 354th FG Takes Mustang into Combat in ETO

The 354th Fighter Group, dubbed "Pioneers," started flying P-51B's over France in December, 1943. Originally part of the Ninth Air Force, the 354th was loaned to the Eighth for bomber escort duty. They received their Merlin-powered P-51B's in November, along with the formidable [Don Blakeslee](#) as a temporary CO.

Blakeslee led the 354th on several missions and drove the pilots hard; he insisted that they engage the German fighters and maintain a collision course, in a deadly game of aerial "chicken," counting on the Germans to break off first. The 354th flew through the bad winter weather of 1943-44, typically dividing its three squadrons into four color-coded flights of four planes each.

Among the outstanding pilots of the 354th that winter were [Glenn Eagleston](#) and Jim Howard. Howard earned the Medal of Honor for shooting down six Bf 110's on January 12, 1944. (Officially, he only claimed two destroyed and four probables.) Unfamiliar with bomber escorts like the Mustangs, the Luftwaffe employed twin-engine Bf 110 *Zerstorer* types against the USAAF, with little success. The 354th resumed its original tactical role in Spring 1944, in preparation for D-Day. In mid- June, they moved to Criqueville, an advanced base in Normandy and simultaneously returned to the Ninth Air Force command. Supporting the Allied ground advance and following it from forward bases, the 354th moved again, to Gael in August, then to Orconte in September. Lt. Col. Lowell Brueland and Major Richard Turner distinguished themselves in this period.

In the 1944-45 winter, the 354th flew P-47's before equipping again with P-51's in early 1945.

## Apr. '44 - MTO Groups Get Mustangs

By early 1944, the delivery of P51-B/C models began to accelerate. Among the early beneficiaries were the 31st and 52nd Fighter Groups of the Fifteenth Air Force (15AF). Formerly flying Spitfires, as part of the Twelfth Air Force, the 31st and 52nd transitioned to Mustangs in April, at the same time as they were transferred to the 15AF. On April 21, the 31st flew their new mounts, P-51B's, to escort B-24's on a bombing mission over Ploesti, Romania. They claimed 17 German planes destroyed, with losses of two Mustangs; for this mission they received a Distinguished Unit Citation.

Operating from rough-and-ready bases in Italy, places like Ghisonaccia, Madna, San Severo, Ramitelli, and Lesina, the 15AF fighter pilots primarily flew escort missions to targets in Romania, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and southern Germany. Two other 15AF fighter groups, the 325th "Checkertails," and the famed 332nd [Tuskegee Airmen](#) "Redtails," also received the Mustangs in Spring 1944. All four of these groups transitioned to the -D model within a few months. Some notable Mustang aces of the MTO whose stories are told here include: [Robert Goebel](#), [Herky Green](#), [John Voll](#), and [James Varnell](#).



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## June '44 - Arrival of -D Models

By far the most numerous P-51 (over 8,000 produced) and also the best known, the -D model development began in 1943. It improved two drawbacks of the B/C model: poor rearward visibility and inadequate firepower of four machine guns (which were mounted at an angle and were subject to frequent jams).

Even the Malcolm hood hadn't fixed the P-51's rearward visibility problem. Learning from the British installation of a "bubble" or "tear-drop" canopy in the Spitfire, both Republic (for its P-47) and North American Aviation (for the P-51) started work on a **Plexiglass bubble canopy** in mid-1943. For stability, and to prevent distortion, the canopy was mounted in a very deep, rubber-lined metal sill; it slid back on rails. To accommodate the canopy, the rear fuselage was cut down. The new version included **six .50 caliber machine guns**, mounted upright, minimizing jams.



Test pilot Bob Chilton first flew the **XP51-D** in November, 1943. The Inglewood plant eventually turned out 6500 -D models; the Dallas plant produced 1600 of the identical -K model.

The 85 gallon fuselage tank was included on the P51-D from the start. The directional stability problems that it caused for the B/C models worsened in the first D models. To correct this, a dorsal fin was added, starting with the Block 10 of the P-51D.

Another new feature of the P-51D was the **K-14 gunsight**, which greatly assisted deflection shooting. The K-14 computed and displayed the correct angle of deflection needed to hit a moving airplane. The pilot entered the wingspan of the target and the range, lined up the target in the piper, and pressed the trigger button.

### **June '44 - Mustangs in the ETO, Mission to Russia**

It was in the European Theatre, flying over Germany, that made the Mustang and many of its pilots famous. The Eighth Air Force had struggled with its daylight bombing missions over Germany; unescorted, the bomber losses were unsustainable. With the Merlin engine, the Mustang could fly over eight hours, and have time to dogfight the Luftwaffe as well. As mentioned above, the 354th Fighter Group, temporarily assigned to the Eighth AF, was the first group to fly Mustangs over Europe. Other groups followed. The 357th flew its first Mustang combat missions in February, 1944. Shortly, the 4th Fighter Group, whose boss, [Don Blakeslee](#), had been tirelessly begging for Mustangs, received their P-51B's, in time for "Big Week," the USAAF late-February assault on Germany. "Big Week" was a direct attack on Germany's fighter force: bombing its manufacturing plants and airfields, and shooting its operational planes out of the sky.

In early 1944, VIII Fighter Command (VIII FC) focused on destroying the Luftwaffe. It encouraged and publicized aces; destruction of planes on the ground "counted" in a pilot's tally. This was an unusual step; no other air force has ever recognized "ground kills" in a fighter pilots claims. But VIII FC figured that "a plane was a plane" and strafing was hazardous and unpopular. So it offered the recognition.

They also juggled the sometimes conflicting demands of morale and manpower requirements. Early on, the 8th followed RAF policy, rotating pilots off front-line combat after 200 hours. But the extended escort missions used up 200 hours quickly; eventually the limit was raised to 300 hours. Indeed the USAAF recognized the value of sending experienced pilots home to train new ones. The Germans



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tended to keep their pilots at the front, until they were killed or until the war ended. Consequently, later Mustang pilots frequently found their German opponents to be untrained.

Decoration of personal aircraft with kill-markers, little swastikas or crosses near the canopy rail, was permitted or even encouraged. As was decoration of planes with group color schemes, thus the 352nd were the "Blue-Nosed Bastards of Bodney."

**Here are the stories of some of the highest scoring P-51 aces of the ETO.**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Kills</b>	<b>Medals</b>	<b>Unit</b>	<b>Plane</b>
<a href="#">George Preddy</a>	26.8	DSC	352FG	<i>Cripes A' Mighty</i>
<a href="#">John C. Meyer</a>	24.0	DSC	352FG	<i>Petie 3rd</i>
<a href="#">Ray Wetmore</a>	22.6	-	359FG	<i>Daddy's Girl</i>
<a href="#">Dominic Gentile</a>	21.8	DSC	4FG	<i>Shangri-La</i>
<a href="#">Leonard 'Kit' Carson</a>	18.5	-	357FG	<i>Nooky Booky IV</i>
Glenn T. Eagleston	18.5	-	354FG	-
<a href="#">John Godfrey</a>	18.0	DFC	4FG	<i>Reggie's Reply</i>
<a href="#">John B. England</a>	17.5	DFC	357FG	<i>U've Had It</i>
John F. Thornell Jr.	17.3	DSC	352FG	<i>Patty Ann II</i>
<a href="#">Henry W. Brown</a>	17.2	DFC	355FG	<i>Hun Hunter from Texas</i>
<a href="#">Robert W. Foy</a>	17.0	-	357FG	<i>Reluctant Rebel / Little Shrimp</i>
<a href="#">Ralph 'Kid' Hofer</a>	16.5	DFC	4FG	<i>Salem Representative</i>
<a href="#">Clarence 'Bud' Anderson</a>	16.3	-	357FG	<i>Old Crow</i>
<a href="#">Don Blakeslee</a>	15.5	DFC	4FG	WD-C
Richard A. Peterson	15.5	-	357FG	<i>Hurry Home Honey</i>
<a href="#">William Whisner</a>	15.5	DSC	352FG	<i>Moonbeam McSwine</i>
<a href="#">Donald Bochkay</a>	14.8	-	357FG	<i>Speedball Alice</i>
<a href="#">Donald Strait</a>	13.5	-	356FG	<i>Jersey Jerk</i>
Donald S. Bryan	13.3	-	352FG	<i>Little One III</i>
Glennon T. Moran	13.0	-	352FG	<i>Little Ann</i>
Clyde B. East	12.0	-	10PRG	<i>Lil Margaret</i>
George W. Gleason	12.0	-	479FG	<i>Hot Toddy</i>
Howard Hively	12.0	-	4FG	<i>The Deacon</i>
Pierce W. McKennon	12.0	-	4FG	<i>Ridge Runner</i>
Robin Olds	12.0	-	479FG	<i>Scat VII</i>
Nick Megura	11.8	-	4FG	<i>III Wind</i>
<a href="#">Chuck Yeager</a>	11.5	DSC	357FG	<i>Glamorous Glen</i>

Louis Norley	11.3 -	4FG	<i>Red Dog XII</i>
<a href="#">Urban Drew</a>	6.0 -	361FG	<i>Detroit Miss</i>

Other 8AF Mustang nicknames included:

*Betty-E, Betty Jo IV, Betty Lee III, Big Beautiful Doll, Boise Bee, Boomerang Jr, Constance, Dana Kay, Dove of Peace, Down for Double, Ferocious Frankie, Happy Jack's Go Buggy, HELL-ER-BUST, June, Katydid, Little Chic, Louisiana Heat Wave, Lucky Lady VII, Luscious Jr, Man O' War, Milly, Miss Marilyn II, Missouri Armada, Missouri Mauler, Miss Steve, Nite, OLE II, Penny 4, Princess Elizabeth, Slender Tender & Tall, Texas Terror IV, The Impatient Virgin, The Iowa Beaut, The Only Genevieve, The Shillelagh, The Yakima Chief, Thunder Bird, Yi-Yi,*



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### Oct. '44 - Ben Drew Downs Two Jets

The German Me 262 jets could outfly the Mustangs by 100 MPH in level flight. Fighting them on equal terms, at altitude, was hopeless. Their only weakness was their slow acceleration, so they were vulnerable at take-off. The Mustang pilots sought to make the most of this (and of their superior numbers) by loitering over Me 262 airfields. On October 7, 1944, he was over the Achmer airfield and surprised two jets taking off, and shot them both down. (*I am not positive, but I think this was the only double victory ever recorded by a piston-engined aircraft over jet-powered enemies. - SS.*)

### Jan. '45 - Operation Bodenplatte

On New Year's Day, 1945, the Luftwaffe made a final mighty assault, in an all-out effort. The 352nd Group, of which [John C. Meyer](#) was then deputy commander, was operating from field Y-29, Asche, Belgium. Meyer had a hunch that the Luftwaffe might gamble on New Year's Day as a good day to catch the Allied airfields napping. He felt the enemy would believe a New Year's Eve hangover might have caused the pilots to sleep in that morning. Meyer postponed the 487th Squadron's party one day, which proved to be a wise decision. As Meyer was about to lead 12 P-51s off the runway, the field was attacked by an estimated 50 enemy fighters. Taking off with full wing tanks, Meyer shot down one FW-190 just after he had raised his landing gear. Then, in a 45-minute running battle, he

downed another FW-190. The 352nd was credited with destroying 23 enemy fighters that day. The superb actions of the 487th Squadron that day earned them a Distinguished Unit Citation.

### **mid '45 - The Fastest Mustang - P51-H**

Based on the improved Packard Merlin V-1659-9 engine, the fastest Mustang, the P51-H was introduced into production in June, 1944. The fuselage was lengthened by two feet, (to 33 feet, 4 inches) and the rudder and fin were increased in height. Other changes were made to the air intake, the canopy, the fuselage fuel tank (reduced to 50 gallons) and the radiator ducts. Bob Chilton took up the first P51-H in February, 1945. Along with the long-range P-47N, the P51-H was intended for the invasion of Japan. Some were issued to operational units in the Pacific before V-J Day, but none entered combat. 555 of the -H model were built before the program was cancelled in 1946. In Korea, the heavier and stronger -D model was preferred.

### **1950-53 - Korea**

While the Korean War is thought of as a jet war, the Mustang, now the F-51, played a key role in ground attack. F-51's flew over 60,000 missions in the Korean War, and were credited with destroying 12 enemy aircraft. One Mustang pilot, Major Louis Seville, earned the Medal of Honor.

### **1950's - Other Foreign Users**

#### **July '69 - The Soccer War**

In 1969, Honduras and El Salvador went to war, instigated by disputed World Cup qualifying matches. In the brief war, both Mustangs and Corsairs saw action, surely the last hurrah of these World War Two veteran airplanes.

### **Survivors**

About 280 Mustangs survive today, half of them fly-able.

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**Recommended Web Site:** [North American P-51 Mustang article](#) - another excellent and detailed aircraft article by Joe Baugher

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