Research Project 7701

The North American Aviation P-51H Mustang

Part II

by David R. McLaren

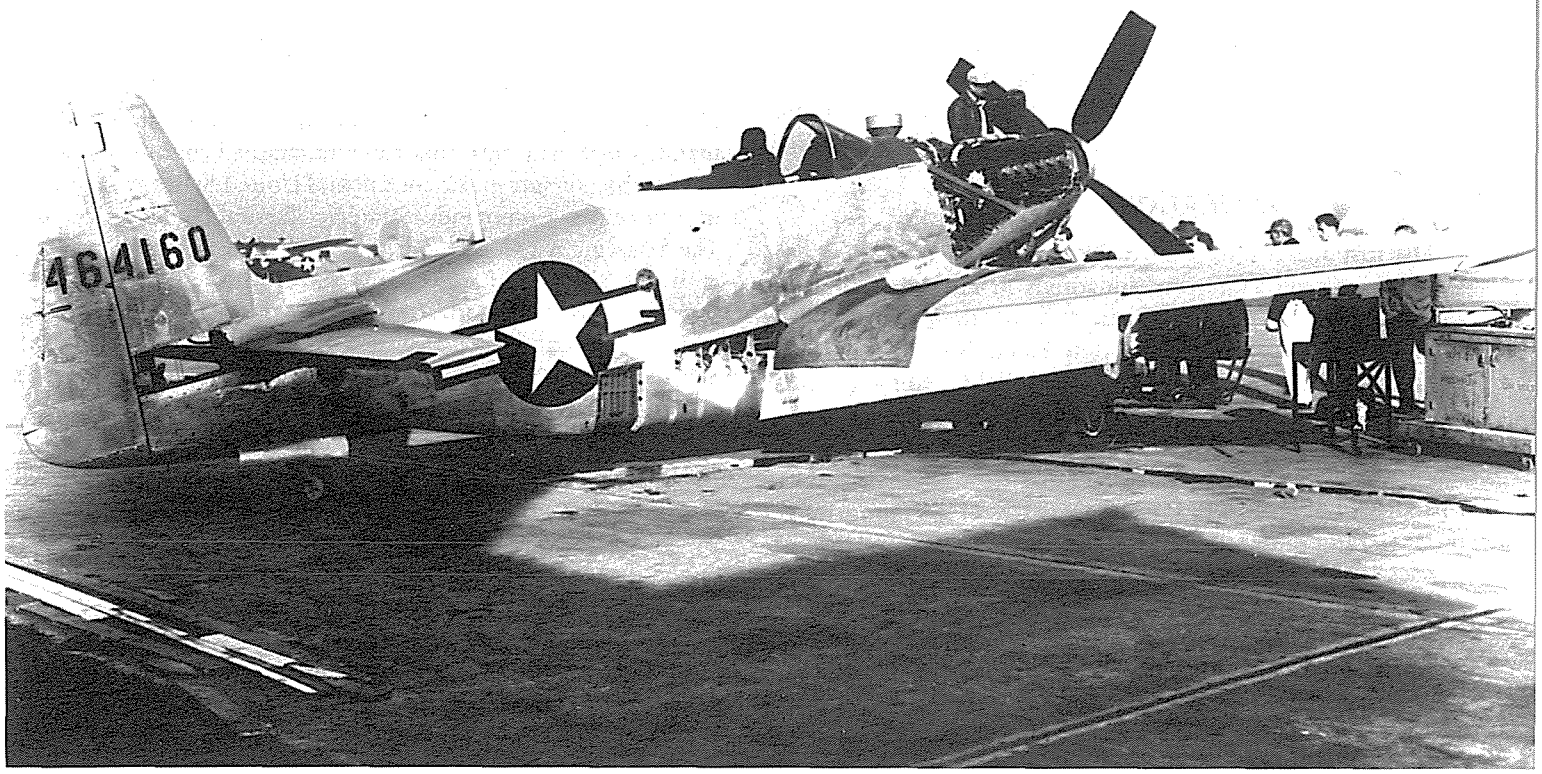
A letter from Allen Andrews of Rockwell International, Columbus [Ohio] Division to the Air Force Museum, dated February 18, 1975, is probably representative of the ongoing question of whether the H ever got into combat. Mr. Andrews was responding to this question, and stated that some company employees who were in the Pacific during the latter stages of WWII claimed to have seen Hs parked on flightlines.

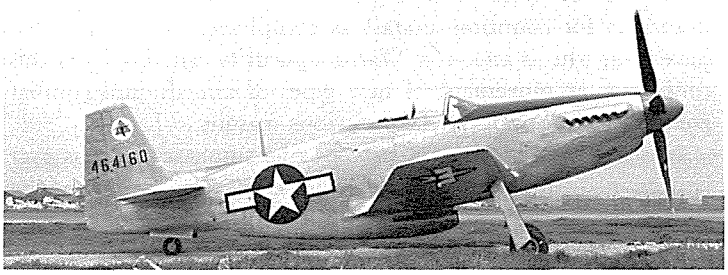
The whole question of whether the H ever got into combat has reached the proportions of fiction. It has been over 30 years since WWII and this aircraft's production, yet myths abound. Probably one of the major reasons behind this is that the aircraft were coming off the production line at an assumed rate sufficient to equip one or more combat groups. However, the military is notorious for counting aircraft as completed that don't even have their wheels attached. Wartime security can also foster this conjecture as movement of new types of aircraft into combat zones were not publicized for obvious reasons.

It is an interesting note that not one single article was ever written in any major publication which covered the advent of the P-51H. As late as July 1945 articles may be found in magazines such as *Aviation* discussing the aerodynamic design of the P-51D, yet there was no mention of any of the "Lightweights" at all.

The earliest statement concerning the H going off to war may be found in the August 1945 issue of *Airforce.* A short article entitled "Pacific Fighter Planes" mentions the planned use of the P-47N, P-51H, and P-61 against Japan. The December 1945 issue of *Skyways,* in an article entitled "Planes That Missed the War," states that the H was "among the aircraft which got under the wire in actual combat. . . ." A month later, the January 1946 issue of *Air Trails* came out with another quote, "This sleek fighter's war record helped make America supreme in the air." The story included a three-view drawing of an H, except it was a D.

Information fell from publication after the 1947 *Jane's All the World Aircraft* until publication of William Green's *Famous Fighters of the Second World War, Vol. 1, 1960.* Green stated flatly, "A number of fighter groups in the Pacific re-equipped with this variant." He reiterated his error again in *Fighters, Vol. IV, 1961.*





44-64160: The first flight of this aircraft was made on Feb. 3, 1945, by North American's chief Mustang test pilot Bob Chilton. However, most of the flight tests on this particular aircraft were flown by George Welch. It became available and was delivered to the joint Army Air Force/North American Flight Test Division on Jan. 1, 1945. It never became a squadron-assigned aircraft. (NAA Photo)

There are photographs which can lead the unwary into thinking that the H saw combat because of their paint schemes. The 57th Fighter Group of the Alaskan Air Command commenced using squadron codes when they received their P-51Hs in 1946. With the exception of the 86th FG, flying P-47s in Europe, this practice of using codes had been done away with in late 1945 when the use of "Buzz Letters" was implemented. There is also the oft-published photograph of 44-64471, "Ah'm Available," which was assigned to the 62nd Fighter Squadron, 56th Fighter Group, purportedly operating in the Pacific. This aircraft was TDY to Ladd Field when the photograph was taken in early 1947. In both cases the red bar had not become a part of the national insignia (June 1947), and thus many viewers thought they were seeing something they were not.

To squelch this rumor once and for all: *No* P-51H ever went to the Pacific Theater of Operations. And with the exception of acting as a deterrent fighter off the western coast of Alaska during the 1948 Berlin situation, they never had the opportunity to exhibit their prowess at all. As far as the Korean War is concerned, it might be considered ironic that it was not used over there since it was designed to be stronger than the D by 10%. The reason it was not used was that there no longer remained enough spare parts in the inventory to sustain long-term combat operations, which was not a shortcoming of the aircraft's design.

OPERATIONAL HISTORY

The first actual squadron strength assignments of the P-51H were to Training Command squadrons in Florida (500th AU, 3635th, and 3820th at Tyndall, and the 610th at Eglin); the 1st BASUT and 1100th ABG at Bolling Field, Washington, D.C.; and the 412th Fighter Group at March Field, Calif. Eleven Hs and six F-6Ds were assigned to the 39th Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron of the 412th FG by the end of 1945.

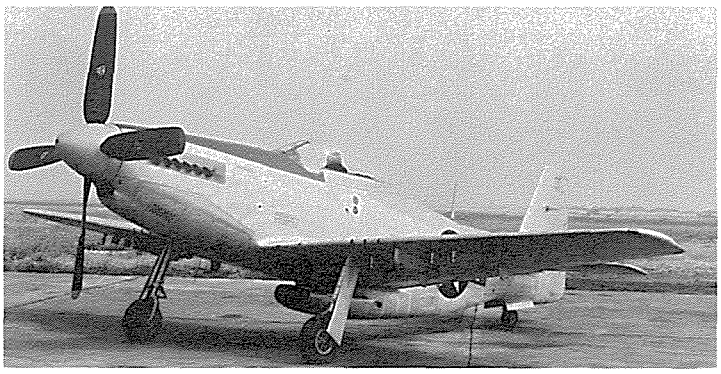
The 412th FG, 4th Air Force, was originally envisioned as our first all-jet fighter group. But due to delays in the production of the P-80, and the discovered unfeasibility of the P-59, Mustangs were assigned as an interim aircraft. The group had been ordered to prepare for deployment to the Pacific as a tactical unit, but instead was forced to spend their flying time in training as a ground support unit. As P-80s became available the Mustangs were transferred elsewhere, but they never received enough jet aircraft to become combat ready until after WWII.

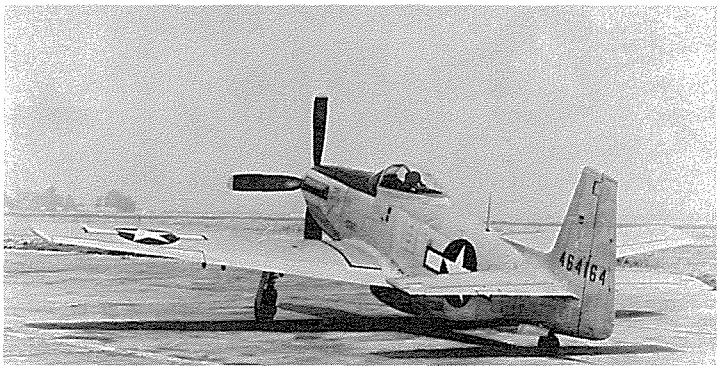
The assignment of the Hs to the 39th PRS was their only one to a USAF/AAF reconnaissance unit, thus this may have been the sole time where the internal camera installation was used operationally. By the end of November 1945, 135 hours had been flown in Hs by 39th PRS pilots and they all had become "checked out" without mishap. The 39th was deactivated on July 29, 1946, and their insignia was transferred to the newly formed 101st FS of the Massachusetts Air National Guard. The squadron's assigned aircraft were transferred to the 440th BASUT at March before reassignment elsewhere.

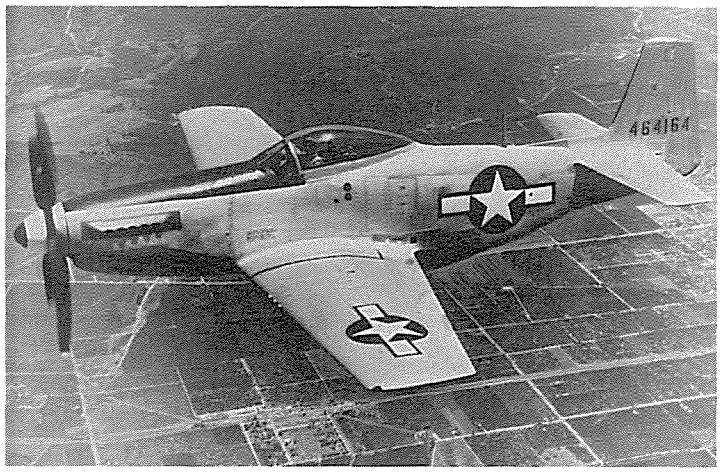
At the end of World War II the Army Air Force had 2,253,182 men assigned. Aircraft totaled 2,865 very heavy bombers (B-29s) and 16,799 fighters. But by 1946 the Service totals were reduced to 305,827 men, 3,040 VH bombers and 1,983 fighters. Still they remained in a fiscal position of being overloaded with war equipment that they could not economically support under peacetime budgets. And there were still many men who had served during the war that were clamoring for their discharges. In order to begin anew and still maintain a viable air force, if one would be required, General Tooey Spaatz ordered a reorganization of the combat force along lines which had been proposed during the war to promote an autonomous air force.

Three new commands were "born" on March 21, 1946, to implement his theories. The original Continental Air Command, which had until that time maintained control over all of the combat aircraft in the continental United States, was broken into three new Commands, Strategic, Tactical, and Air Defense. The Strategic Air Command, as an example, began its new life with 600 aircraft, of which only three were jets (P-80s). SAC received further authorization for two fighter groups of their own for long-range escort duties. The 56th FG, to be based at Selfridge Field, Michigan, would be the first, and they would be equipped with the P-51H. The second FG would be the 4th, and they would also be based at Selfridge, but they would not be reactivated until the P-80 became available. Three additional fighter groups were slated as the 27th, 33rd, and 82nd, but at this time they were only "paper."

The Tactical Air Command also was "born" at this time, equipped mostly with D model Mustangs, P-47s, and A-26s. They received a few P-51Hs at Shaw Field, S.C. TAC's records are incomplete and not, apparently, accurate. Record cards indicate that P-51H serials 44-64164, -201, and -207 were assigned to the 363rd Fighter Squadron, and -372 and -391 to the 316th BASUT. Assigned to the 314th FG at McCord Field, Washing-







44-64164: The most photographed H was delivered to Moffet Field, Calif., on June 2, 1945. Transferred to NACA temporarily at Langley Field, Va., for aerodynamic tests, followed by Air Materiel Command assignments, and eventual assignment to the Calif. Air National Guard where it served with the 195th and 196th squadrons. (NAA)

ton, was 44-64430 and -433. Headquarters TAC at Langley received 44-64181 after duty in Florida.

The Air Defense Command probably felt themselves to be the stepchild in the reorganization. The threat, for the moment, of attack by another country was remote. They received only two P-47 and five P-61 squadrons.

But soon dramatic changes began to take place, both within the AAF and on the international scene. The Truman Plan was implemented on March 12, 1947. This, along with the Marshall Plan, would have far-reaching impact on the course of our external relations with Russia. In effect, the United States began buying friends away from Russia's grasp. The Marshall Plan was to rebuild Europe by providing economic aid to countries that would side with us against communism. And under the Truman Plan we would militarily support these countries by providing technical expertise and military goods, Greece becoming the first recipient of AT-6s and C-47s. In all, these efforts did not sit well with Joseph Stalin.

On June 26, 1947, the National Security Act was signed by President Truman. Its effective date would be Sept. 18, and the AAF would become the United States Air Force. At this time we had 303,000 men in the AAF manning 38 combat groups. But only 11 of these groups could be considered as combat ready. In a show of strength the new USAF commenced rotating B-29s TDY to bases in Germany and England.

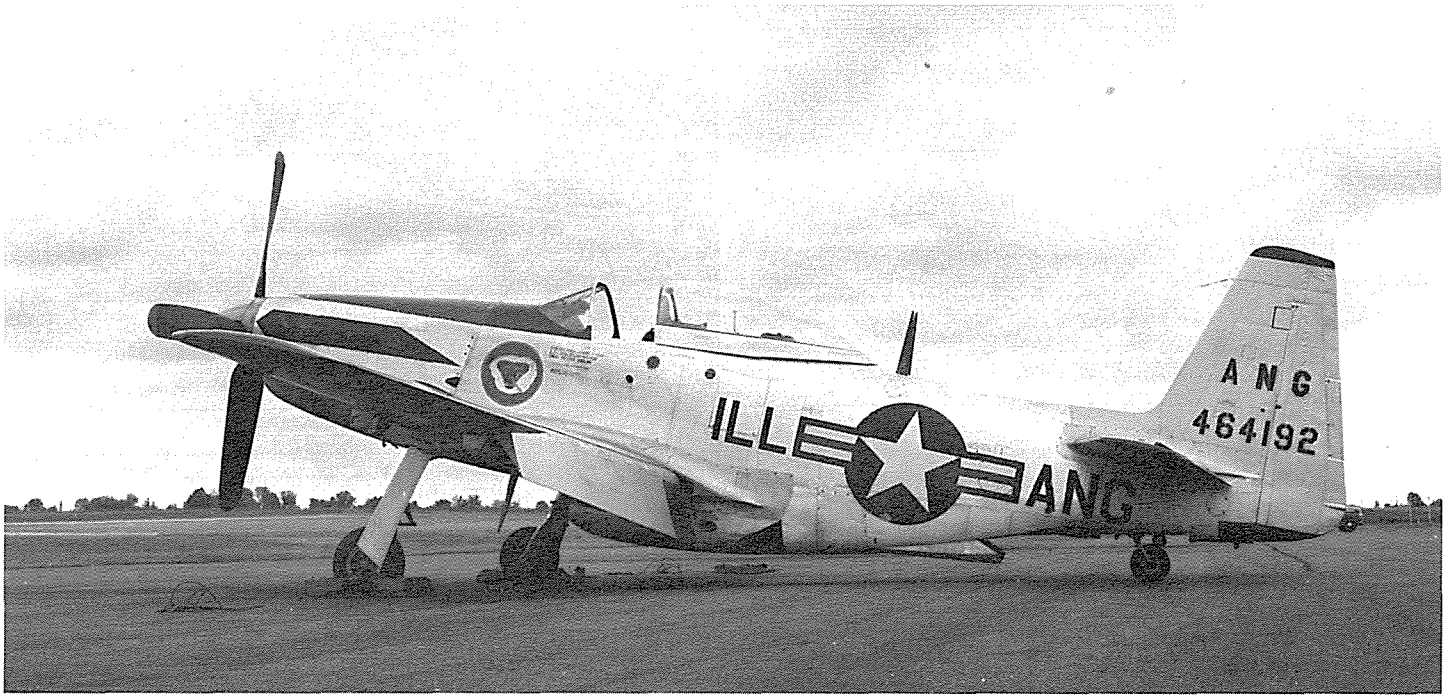
Eight months later, on Feb. 25, 1948, the communists took over Czechoslovakia. Soon afterward the Brussels Treaty was signed between the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. The United States followed suit on June 11 when the U.S. Senate passed a resolution which endorsed the idea that the U.S. should adhere to international military agreements. In the meantime we knew the Russians would not let this display of unity pass. In January combat units had been alerted because of worldwide tension. We knew the Russians were going to test our fortitude, but we did not know where. Unfortunately, both sides were quite aware that the U.S. military strength was very weak as a result of our propensity to keep the armed forces at minimum posture. We had *one* fighter group in Europe, the 86th, equipped with only two squadrons of aged P-47s. The 57th Fighter Group, flying P-51Hs in Alaska, was one of the alerted groups. The 82nd Fighter Group, also flying P-51Hs, was sent to Ladd Field, Fairbanks, Alaska, to support the 57th. The alert status of the P-51H units would continue until it became obvious that the focus of the Russians was on Berlin.

One result of the Berlin Blockade was the consolidation of the Continental Air Command (Conac). The 9th and 12th Air Forces of TAC, and the 1st, 4th, 10th, and 14th of the token ADC were absorbed to form Conac. Only SAC retained its autonomy. The 56th Fighter Group, which had replaced their P-51Hs with P-80s, was transferred to Conac in December 1948 and was given an ADC commitment. At this time the 82nd Fighter Group was giving up their P-51Hs for Ds, and SAC relinquished them to Conac in August 1949. The 82nd Fighter Group also received an ADC commitment, but was deactivated in October.

While several Air National Guard squadrons, upon their Korean War activation, were assigned roles supplementing the ADC, only the 113th Fighter Squadron operated the P-51H as an active ADC squadron during the Korean War. This unit was activated at Stout Field, Indiana, on Feb. 10, 1951, and relocated with their Hs to Scott Field, Illinois, in May. They were replaced by the activated 85th Fighter Interceptor Squadron in November 1952. The 113th turned over to the 85th their Mustangs when they returned to state control. The 85th flew a combination of P-51Ds and Hs until receiving F-86Ds.

WITH THE STRATEGIC AIR COMMAND

As the postwar reorganization of the AAF brought about mass disbanding of combat units it also saw the reactivation of some famous and historical combat groups at new locations. The 56th Fighter Group, of 8th Air Force fame, was reactivated on May 1, 1946, and was attached to the 15th Air Force. It was to be a "Very Long Range" escort group for B-29 operations. The commander selected was the noted Col. David Schilling, and his first task was to pick a suitable location for his new group.



44-64192: After the Grumman/Navy project was completed -192 was returned to the Air Materiel Command who returned it to its original configuration before assignment to the Air National Guard. It served for a month with the 148th FBS of the Penn. ANG before being transferred to the 170th FBS at Springfield, Illinois.
(Photo by Logan Coombs from the Collection of Dick Phillips)

Col. Schilling positioned the reorganizing 56th FG at Selfridge Field, Mich. He felt that of all those bases proffered by HQ AAF, Selfridge would be the best because of its centrally located position. The only major drawbacks to Selfridge was the often inclement winter weather for flying operations, and the lack of adequate off-base dependent housing, particularly during the summer tourist season when prices were elevated beyond the capability of the average GI to pay inflated rents demanded by the civilian populace.

One of the desires of Col. Schilling was to get as many of his original pilots and ground crews back within his command as possible. Major D. Smith was named as CO of the 61st Fighter Squadron, his old outfit. Major Paul Conger, a 11½ kill ace from the original 61st, became CO of the new 62nd FS. Major George Orr was named CO of the 63rd FS. In July 1946, Major Gerald W. Johnson replaced Major Conger as the CO of the 62nd FS. Major Johnson was the first 56th FG "ace" during WWII and racked up a total of 18 kills before becoming a POW. He later became the recipient of the McKay Trophy in 1953. Also in July, Col. Schilling received his commission in the Regular Army as a First Lieutenant!

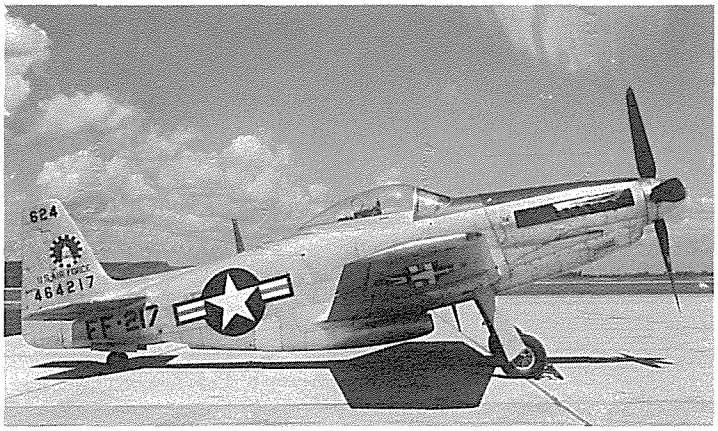
Atypical of Schilling, even though the 56th FG had not yet received any aircraft of their own, he authorized an aerobatic team. They borrowed P-47s from the 146th BASUT and flew airshows all over the Midwest. In light of this effort, when the Group was inspected by a team from Washington in August they were rated as "Superior."

Beginning in September the first P-51Hs began to arrive from the Kelly Field storage depot and the winterization modification center in Spokane, Wash. By the end of the month the full complement of 75 Hs had arrived. There were some difficulties, as few of the ground maintenance personnel had any experience with the idiosyncrasies of the inline engines and their cooling systems. To get around this problem the group reverted to the old system of assigning a crew chief to each aircraft, using those familiar with Merlins or Allisons to oversee the less experienced men.

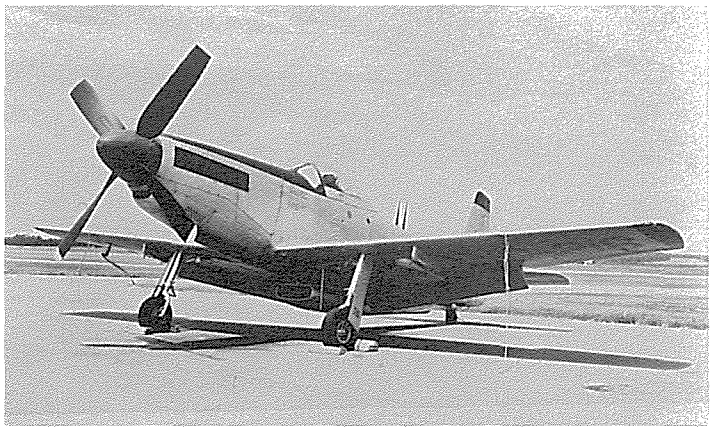
On October 13 the group suffered its first serious accident with the P-51H. The group was flying its first major escort mission from Selfridge, escorting General Spaatz to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Twenty aircraft flew with the General's B-17 to the east edge of Lake Michigan where they broke off and flew southbound and then around the lake to reintercept the B-17 near Milwaukee. Capt. Jack Wildberger, 63rd Fighter Squadron, in 44-64658, was severely injured when the propeller ran-away and he attempted a forced landing on a small airstrip north of Chicago. The aircraft nosed over and Capt. Wildberger lost an eye and suffered a broken back. The aircraft was written off and all of the group's Mustangs were grounded on their return to Selfridge until it was discovered that the run-away was caused by the pressure screen on the propeller governor rupturing—something that was soon remedied.

On October 24 the Deputy Group Commander, Lt. Col. William Banks, and Capt. Billy Edars flew to Ladd Field to prepare for the arrival of the 62nd FS. The group had been alerted in September to expect such a deployment, but it was with mixed emotions when they discovered where they were headed. It was originally intended that each of the three squadrons would rotate through Ladd at two-month intervals. But the winter weather would prevent the first rotation and the forthcoming change of aircraft type cancelled later efforts.

The first difficulties in trying to keep the P-51H operational began to show up in October. Production had been terminated on the type 11 months previously, and even though they had not received a great amount of flying time, there was becoming a parts shortage. Cannabilism had to be resorted to by the 4121st BASUT at Kelly Field, which resulted in the eventual dismantling of nine complete aircraft for spare parts. The problem of on-again, off-again (or up-again, down-again) tail wheels of the Hs plagued the crew chiefs of the 56th until it was discovered that the "restrictors in the retracting mechanisms had been

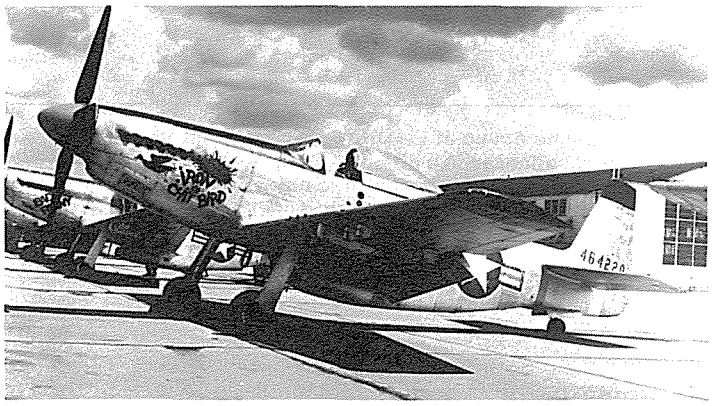


44-64217: A very clean H assigned to the 1050th Air Base Group at Andrews Field, Md. The 1050th had 27 Hs assigned at one time or another. (Photo by Robert Stucky from the Collection of Dick Phillips)



44-64216: Contrary to many statements, the P-51H, although never having the nomenclature of F-6H or RF-51H did serve in a photo-recon role. Notice inboard of the bomb rack the camera installation on this H of the 157th, South Carolina ANG. The 157th had 12 Hs while the 153rd out of Meridian, Miss., which also had a guard recon commitment, had at least two. (from the Collection of Paul Stevens)

44-64220: The reverse side of the "Iron Chit Bird." The aircraft, although assigned to the 164th, still bears the squadron insignia of the 64th FS, while the Alaskan Air Command tail stripe has already been removed. (from David Menard Collection via Air Force Museum)



44-64220: Changing of the guard. The "Iron Chit Bird," after assignment to the 164th FS, Ohio ANG at Mansfield. (Photo from the David Menard Collection via the Air Force Museum)

installed backwards [at the factory] causing the tail wheel upon retraction to come up with such force as to weaken the structure." This weakening would cause the wheel to retract as the weight of the aircraft settled toward the tail when the aircraft landed. All of the Hs were once again grounded until a locally produced tail wheel warning light was installed on the instrument panel. (Five P-51Hs had tail wheel retraction problems as they were being delivered from North American, which makes one wonder what was going on in the IG's office.)

Technical Order modifications were accomplished on the propellers as a result of the accident board's findings when they investigated Capt. Wildberger's crash. Capt. Frank W. Klibbe, the Engineering Officer of the 61st FS, flight-checked these modifications against the Wright Field findings with some of his own theories. Diving at maximum power from 10,000 feet he would cycle the prop from fine to coarse while changing the power settings until he was satisfied things were going to work as advertised. The grounding order was lifted in November upon his recommendation.

Ground echelon personnel of the 62nd FS departed by train on November 20 to Ft. Lawton, Washington, en route to Alaska. In order to make up a full complement, many of these men were also from the 61st and 63rd Squadrons, as discharges and transfers had depleted the group's staffing.

On December 18, with Col. Schilling joining along on the first legs, Lt. Col. Johnson led 28 P-51Hs of the 62nd FS off on what was to be a rather frigid TDY. It was a rather exciting start as one aircraft, flown by Capt. Dauphin, was forced to return to Selfridge because of overheating. Soon thereafter a Lt. Smoke, flying 44-64467, declared an emergency as his engine failed and he was forced to crash land near Battle Creek, Mich.

Twenty-six Mustangs staged through Rapid City, S.D., arriving after a three-hour and 20-minute flight. Eighteen of these P-51s then departed on the 19th, but were forced to return because of bad weather between them and their destination of Great Falls, Mont. Capt. Dauphin and Lt. Smoke were then able to catch up with the rest of the squadron with replacement aircraft. The weather finally permitted the squadron to depart en masse on December 21 and they staged through Great Falls, Edmonton, Alberta, and Whitehorse, YT. They arrived at Ft. Nelson, Fairbanks, Alaska, on December 28.

At Selfridge, in January 1947, the 65th Fighter Wing was activated. This decimated the ranks of the 56th FG even further, as many personnel were transferred to wing headquarters. (This was another of those incongruous happenstances of military life. The previous month had seen many key people, most of them officers, take "forced discharges." Enlisted men in the lower four grades that were TDY in Alaska with the 62nd FS were notified that they could be released from active service if they desired. Of which, 30 out of the 44 eligible were flown back to the

44-64266: Engine run-up at Ft. Dix, NJ. This aircraft has been shown in many publications with a different viewpoint when its cowling and fuselage were streaked with oil; tracings still being visible in this photograph. Observe that it still is fitted with the interim fin, photographed in Dec. 1945. (AAHS Photo)

44-64275: Ohio ANG, 162nd FS, 178th TFG. (Photo by Logan Coombs, from the Collection of Dick Phillips)

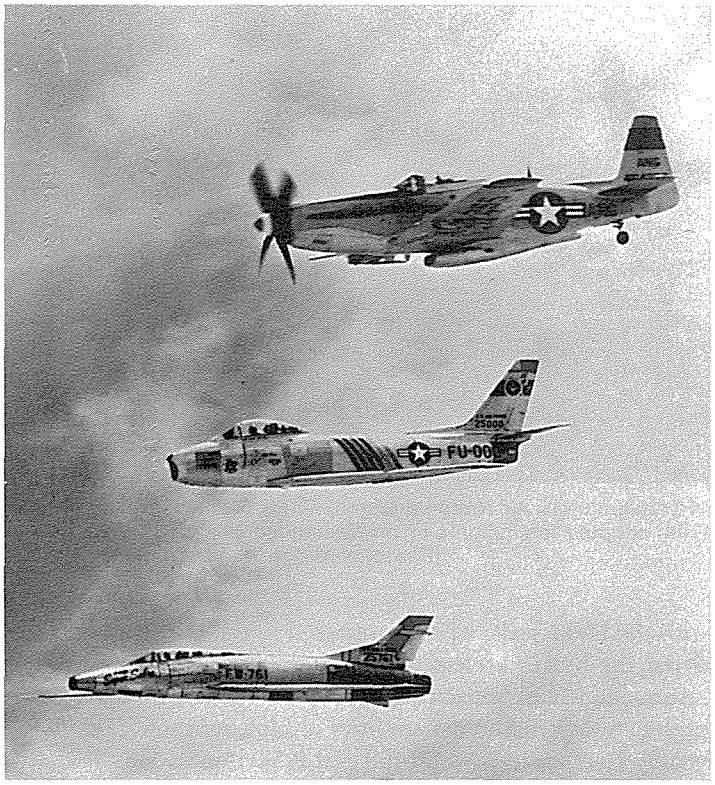
ZI for discharge. In late 1945 and early 1946 P-51Hs of the 1st BASUT at Bolling Field, Washington, D.C., appeared as flying billboards with ENLIST IN THE AAF—BE A GUARDIAN OF VICTORY painted on their sides!)

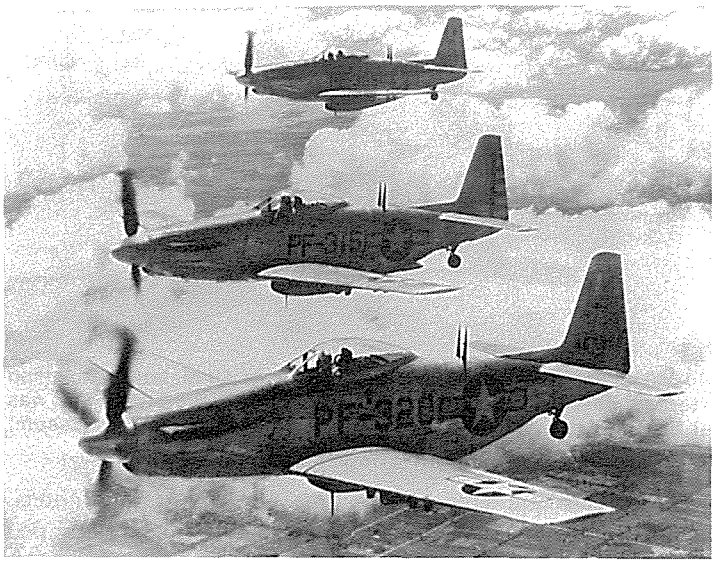
Meanwhile, at Selfridge, Col. Schilling was trying something innovative. As mentioned in the description of the P-51H airplane, the aircraft carried an AN/ARA-8. This piece of radio gear was used for long-range navigation, and was particularly useful on overwater missions or for homing in case of the aircraft being lost. The largest advantage was that the pilot did the homing based upon his instrument reading, which reduced the likelihood of being given the reciprocal heading to fly instead of the proper course, as unfortunately did happen occasionally when using ground-based, direction-finding stations. It was Col. Schilling's theory that the AN/ARA-8 could be used to locate an airborne aircraft also, as it could home in on any radio frequency then in use. The potential was obvious, it could be used to intercept and escort our own bombers, or intercept and shoot down the enemy if he got careless and broke radio silence. In practice attempts with B-29s, the Mustangs out of Selfridge were found capable of intercepting the heavy bombers over Kansas.

Now that winter had arrived in northern Michigan, a further shortage of parts began plaguing the 56th FG. The pilots were overusing their brakes on icy runways and taxiways and thus wearing out the disk brake pads at an alarming rate. Additional problems were noted in the Janitrol heaters, as the points would burn out if used on the ground. (The points actually were more like glow plugs.) This created the situation of giving the pilot the choice of where he wanted to be cold, while waiting in the cockpit on the ground, or in the air.

The 62nd Flight Echelon, known officially as Mission 9089BZ, at Ladd began reporting many rough engines because of the long-range cruise settings of 2000 rpm at 34" hg used on their flight to Alaska. These settings caused fouled intake plugs. The fuel/mixture temperatures in the climate were another problem, which was eventually cured by the ingenuity of the crew chiefs. Originally they placed solid plates over the cheesehole carburetor intakes, but since this area was controlled by intake baffles in the duct anyhow, it was not overly effective. They then installed baffles in the coolant scoop to raise the coolant and mixture temperatures, which helped, but was not the entire answer. While also working on the problem of how to keep the cockpit warmer they discovered the answer to both problems on most of the squadron's aircraft. On the P-51H-10, the fresh-air duct is located in the coolant scoop (or "doghouse"), and by rerouting the hose from in front of to behind the intercooler, to catch the warmed air, they thereby warmed the cockpit. They also relocated the coolant baffle to behind the intercooler, which caused back pressure and thus also retained heat for the fuel/mixture portion of the heat exchanger.

One Mustang was written off at Ladd on January 6, 1947, when Lt. C.A. King in 44-64274 and Capt. C.J. Crenshaw in -267 collided while taxiing. Visibility was reduced by a rotary snow plow working upwind of the runway, and Lt. King's pro-





44-64320: An extremely rare formation view of P-51Hs of the famed 56th Fighter Group. The photograph was taken on Jan. 22, 1947, over Michigan when the Group was escorting Governor Kim Sigler to Selfridge Field on an inspection tour. (USAF Photo via the Simpson Library, Maxwell AFB)

44-64255: In transition. A 195th FS, Calif. ANG, P-51H formed up with an F-100A-1NA and F-86F-30NA which was flown by Col. Tice, the Commander of Nellis AFB at the time. (North American Aviation)

peller virtually cut Capt. Crenshaw's P-51H in half behind the cockpit. There were no injuries.

In February the 62nd FS dispatched a letter back to the Headquarters of the 56th FG describing just how conditions were. It was not the most enviable location to run a fighter squadron. The winter temperatures were far colder than the men had ever experienced. There were 23 days where the temperature fell below –50°, with a low of –56° recorded. The highest temperature was a paltry +18°. Unless the temperature was –20° or warmer, it was just too cold to fly, as the Janitrol heaters were inadequate. Of the 27 aircraft now assigned, they were able to keep an average of 14 in commission, in spite of the numbing weather.

Meanwhile, back at Selfridge, two P-51Hs were damaged beyond economical repair in accidents. On February 12, Lt. B.G. Cameron struck a snowbank on takeoff, writing off 44-64717. The cause was attributed to the claim that Cameron was wearing an A-6 type flying boot and could not adequately feel the amount of brake pressure he was applying to keep the aircraft lined up on the runway. On February 21, Capt. A.E. Linciome, while making a low approach at night, hit a four-foot unlighted snowbank on the approach end of the runway demolishing 44-64360.

March brought a new mode of life to the 56th FG as they received their first P-80s on the 8th, which were followed by 23 more by the end of the month. Twenty-four P-51Hs were thus transferred at the same time back to Kelly Field for storage under project STO-964. Also this month came the reactivation of the 56th Fighter Group's arch rival during WWII, the 4th FG. This reactivation caused still further shortages in the 56th, as once again they had to give up some of their best men to staff a new unit.

Three more Mustang accidents occurred within the 56th FG during the month of March, one of them tragically fatal. Capt. Charles W. Riffle was killed while flying 44-64271. He was on a cross-country, navigational mission and had just taken off from Wright Field in virtually zero-zero weather conditions when his Mustang crashed on March 2. Engine failure was suspected. On March 7, Capt. Russell B. Westfalt undershot the runway at Ladd Field after being caught in the propwash of his element leader. His P-51H, 44-64199, struck the bank of the Tanana River and was destroyed. Westfalt was not injured. (It is Westfalt's F-80 which is the subject of Monogram's ¼" scale effort. But for some reason, the decals indicate the pilot as a Baker.) The third accident involved 2nd Lt. Anderson Atkinson and 44-64644. He became lost, and with darkness approaching, decided to force-land his Mustang. He was later found, uninjured, near Thompson Station, Tenn., but the aircraft was a write-off.

April saw the transfer of 23 more Mustangs to Kelly Field for storage. The flight was led in squadron strength by Major Orr of the 63rd FS. Due to mechanical problems, three Mustangs had to be left in Memphis, Tenn., and were later flown to Kelly. In a somewhat ironic move, the Army, in anticipation of the 56th FG receiving more P-80s, shipped the group a truckload of tank commander helmets for the pilots to wear.

On April 12, the air echelon of the 62nd FS, being led by Lt. Col. Johnson, returned from Alaska. They left one aircraft, 44-64504, behind for an unknown reason, and it was reclaimed for salvage by the Alaskan Air Command. The unit's enlisted men were flown back to Selfridge from Seattle, where they had arrived by ship. On April 17 the 62nd FS flew to Manchester, New Hampshire, where they put on an airshow for the town's residents. They then landed and "pickled" their aircraft at Grenier Field. This became a PCS move for most of the 62nd FS personnel, as under Project DOM-962 they would form the nucleus of the reactivating 82nd Fighter Group. The 82nd FG officially reactivated on April 22, 1947, and Lt. Col. Johnson was promoted from the 62nd FS Sq. Commander's position to the CO of the new group. The purpose of this new group was to

44-64310: This aircraft came to the ANG out of Air Materiel Command storage. Based at Newark, NJ, it was assigned to the 119th FS. It was at Boston, Mass., Jan. 1952. (David Menard via the A F Museum)

44-64264: Illinois Air National Guard, 170th FBS at Springfield. The 170th adopted the insignia of the disbanded 305th FS. (Photo by M/Sgt. Don Balweg, 183rd TFG)

train officers and enlisted men in very long-range fighters. Original allocations had intended the group to be equipped with twin-engine aircraft of an unknown type. But since the P-51s had been delivered, they flew P-51s.

Some observations made by the 62nd FS on their Alaskan experiences are worth reporting. Fifteen of their P-51Hs were grounded for a lengthy period because of magneto problems and Tech Order compliance. Headquarters SAC would not permit even limited operations with the concerned aircraft during this period. Thus the squadron's total flying hours were reduced approximately 900 hours. In spite of January having zero operational days due to the temperatures, and February having only 17, by February 24 the squadron amassed 3,104:45 hours. They completed 1,645 sorties and expended 50,660 rounds of .50-caliber ammunition. They also released 448 bombs on the practice range. The month of March provided 21 flying days, but the squadron's hours are not recorded.

Aircraft problems were reported in detail; mostly these were brought on by the climate. Canopy ice would form almost immediately after the engine was started in subzero temperatures if the canopy was not left open to equalize the temperature. The tires would freeze to the pavement if the aircraft was parked outside for any length of time. This would result in flat spots, or loss of tread. Oxygen masks would freeze to the pilot's face if worn for awhile, removed, and then refastened, due to condensation.

Navigational problems were a paramount item in the vastness of the area. There was a definite lack of clear-cut landmarks in the geography due to snow cover. Additional navigational trials involved the traits of the LF/MF (Low Frequency) Radio Range at Fairbanks because of the inherent tendency of the Northeast Leg to "swing." There was also a false cone of silence on this leg, all of which could give an unwary pilot an indication of being somewhere he didn't really want to be. Instrument flight was definitely not recommended in the first place because of the lack of deicing equipment installed in the P-51. If some type of emergency would require a pilot to fly on instruments, a special precaution had to be followed before takeoff. The directional gyro had to be run for a minimum of 30 minutes to insure that the gymbals would not stick.

The squadron had four failures of the tailwheel retracting mechanism before they gave up and locked them down. This was caused, this time, by a thickening of the hydraulic fluid at low temperatures, and too small of an orifice in the actuating cylinders. Additional landing gear problems were associated with the brake seals, which contracted in the cold and thus rendered the brakes useless. A minimum of 100 to 200 feet was recommended between taxiing aircraft because of these brake problems, and reduced visibilities in blowing snow.

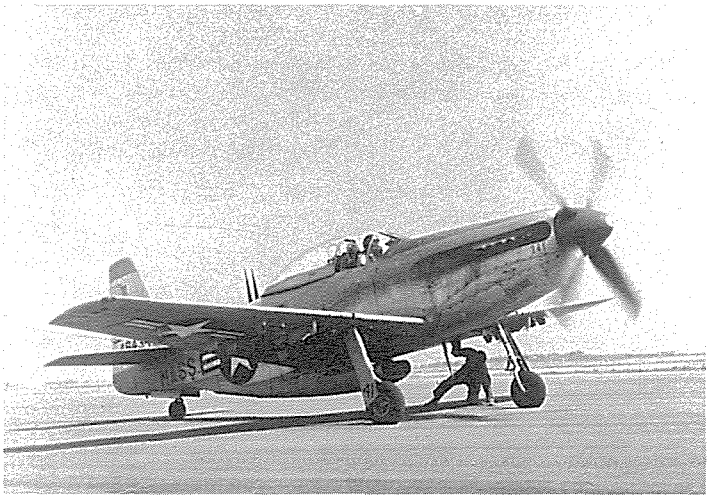
May 1947 pretty well terminated P-51H operations as a first-line fighter with the 56th Fighter Group. However, they continued to use the Mustang for several years as a target tug. Originally the 61st Fighter Squadron was relocated to Oscoda, Michigan, to run the group's gunnery range, and they took several P-51Hs with them. In 1949 the 63rd FS replaced the 61st at Oscoda and obtained additional Mustangs from the 82nd FG. Again in 1952 the 63rd received Mustangs, this time from the 85th FIS, all for the target towing role.

The 82nd Fighter Group's reactivation was one of turmoil as far as their personnel sections were concerned. Men were assigned to the 82nd FG from Chanute, Lowery, and Camp Kilmer. This increased their staffing to 108 officers and 467 enlisted men. But orders were received to transfer 55 officers to Kearney, Nebr., to become the nucleus of another new group. This would be the 27th Fighter Group, composed of the 522nd, 523rd, and 524th Fighter Squadrons, initially to fly the P-51D.

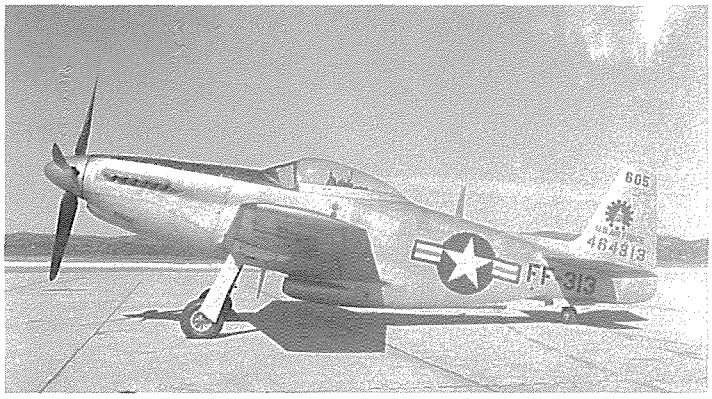
As soon as the 82nd Fighter Group's personnel situation stabilized they activated their first squadron, the 95th. It was commanded by Major Leland Raphiun, and most of his pilots were either from the old 62nd FS or were overseas returnees. On June 30 the 96th FS was activated and was commanded by Major William F. Wilkerson. On the same day the 97th was also activated and was commanded by Major John D. Shivers, but this unit had no aircraft assigned as yet.

July brought an increase in aircraft complement with 48 P-51Hs being ferried to Grenier from Kelly under Project DOM-962D and DOM-969. (These project numbers, DOM-969, etc., were often stenciled on the aircraft's data blocks, which often helps to place the aircraft's assignment.) An official message from Headquarters 15th Air Force at Colorado Springs, Colo., was received via Selfridge notifying 82nd FG commanders that the 66th Combat Fighter Wing (Very Long Range) was now assuming control of the 82nd FG. This new wing had the same effect upon the 82nd FG as the activation of the 65th FW had on the 56th FG, more personnel shortages.

With August, the 96th FS became operational, and all three



44-64341: Checking the shell ejection chutes. The aircraft was assigned to the 101st FS, 102nd FG, and was destroyed on Jan. 10, 1954, in a ground accident after accruing 492 hours. (Photo by M/Sgt. Walter J. Fleming via David Menard)



44-64313: A super-clean H attached to the 1050th Air Base Group at Andrews AFB, MD. (Photo by Robert Stucky, Dick Phillips Collection)

squadrons of the 82nd FG commenced operating under the Hopson Plan, i.e., autonomous from group headquarters. Two P-51Hs were written off, 44-64468, on August 7, and -614 on August 28, both due to unknown causes.

September became yet another month of transfers. The 95th FS, minus aircraft, departed for Roswell, New Mexico, to become the nucleus for the activating 33rd Fighter Group, composed of the 58th, 59th, and 60th Fighter Squadrons. The 33rd FG was officially activated on August 25 under the command of Major Raphiun. The 33rd FG would fly P-51Ds until August 1948 when they were replaced with F-84s. Capt. Charles L. McMillin became the interim CO of the new 95th FS until replaced shortly thereafter by Major William J. O'Donnell.

Maintenance problems with the P-51H reached the virtual status of a plague, according to the official report, within the 82nd FG. The lack of Packard engine kits for engine work caused extended down time on overhauls. The rocker-arms were constantly going bad also. Carburetors were another big headache, due to a shortage of parts. Most of the problem engines had to be packed up and shipped to the Air Materiel Depot at Olmsted, Pa., for repair or general overhaul. On October 21, all of the group's P-51Hs were grounded because fatigue cracks had been discovered in the fuselage webbing just above the "flipper door" hinges on 31 Mustangs. Two more P-51Hs were written off this month: 44-64260 at Grenier on October 6, and -202 on October 19 at Mitchell Field, L.I., N.Y., both to unknown causes.

General Eisenhower paid a visit to Grenier in October, flying in and out in his C-54 "Sunflower." His inspection was an indication of the approaching "Cold War," as all of the men were thereafter briefed on the geopolitics of the USSR.

November saw continuing and additional maintenance problems. The AN/ARC-3 radio would not stay channelized, particularly between the locally used "A" and "B" frequencies. The problem was discovered to be caused by static discharge from the use of an improper antenna wire—installed somewhere along the aircraft's history—and faulty tuning motors. As of November 15 only nine P-51Hs were flyable due to maintenance crews being unable to get the aircraft up to Tech Order standards. Twenty aircraft were out due to broken fuel booster pumps. It was "guesstimated" that the fuel pump problem was due to improper fuel chemistry. By November 19, though, the group was able to get 19 Mustangs airborne for a mission to intercept General George Kenney's B-17 over Morristown, Pa. General Kenney at that time was the Commanding General of SAC.

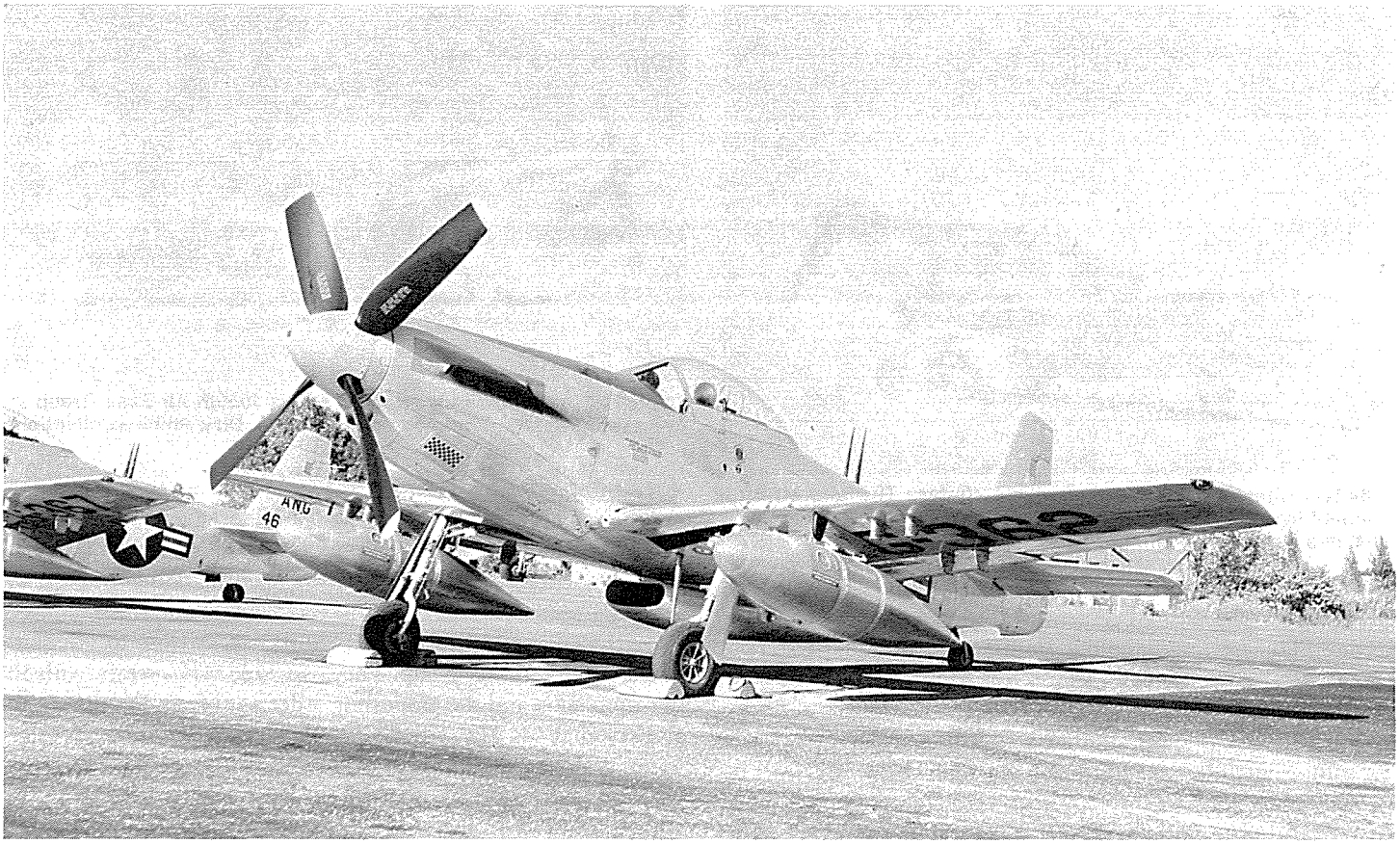
By the end of 1947 the 82nd FG was again close to standard strength for a fighter group. They had 74 P-51H aircraft, with 50 in commission and the grounding order was lifted. Pilot strength also stood at 74. The 96th FS flew to McDill Field, Fla., for air-to-air gunnery training on December 3 and flew 242 sorties before being joined by the 95th on December 16.

January 1948 brought the 82nd FG their first test as a viable fighter group. They had been notified by Hq. SAC to expect an ORI (Operational Readiness Inspection) between January 5 and January 10. On January 8, the group was dispatched on an escort mission with 61 Mustangs. The mission was operated in conjunction with the 307th Bomb Wing, VH (B-29s), and was scheduled as a test of the new 55 Wing Plan. (The 307th was one of the first B-29 groups to rotate to and through Europe from its home station at McDill.) The ORI was considered a success even though two Mustangs ground aborted, followed by four more in the air, due to mechanical problems.

Operational problems continued as fuel leaks were discovered in three Mustangs. These leaks were thought to be in either the fuel access door or fuel level transmitter. (This was another problem which kept recurring in the H series from the time they were delivered from the factory, as three aircraft were forced to make emergency landings between Inglewood and Kelly because of fuel leaks or gas fumes in the cockpit.)

On February 27 the 96th FS commenced what they assumed to be the first extended overwater mission to Puerto Rico in single-engined fighters. They departed McDill for Boringquen with 17 Mustangs, after a hydraulic failure caused one aircraft to abort. The mission was led by Major Wilkerson, and navigational assistance was provided by a B-29 of the 372nd Bomb Squadron, VH. The intent of this five-hour flight was to determine the individual aircraft's idiosyncrasies in respect to fuel consumption on very long-range missions.

Those efforts directed toward VLR missions in the January ORI and the February trip to Puerto Rico brought an unexpected assignment in March. As the world situation with Stalin rattling his swords was creating an edginess on the political scene, the military justly went on an alert posture. The 82nd FG was notified on March 27 for a mass movement to Ladd Field. The advanced party of men from the 82nd Airdrome Group, and the



44-64362: A brand-new five-year-old airplane. Both -362 and -367 in the background had been stored at Kelly AFB, Texas, until 1951. When taken out of storage they were flown to Burbank, Calif., where they were completely overhauled and inspected and then given to the Air National Guard. These two had just been delivered to the 169th at Peoria, Illinois. (Roger Besecker Collection)

82nd Maintenance and Supply Squadron departed two days later on C-54s, arriving at Ladd on March 31. At Grenier, frantic activity took place among maintenance personnel in efforts to get the aircraft ready for such a long flight. There were still troubles with the AN/ARC-3s, and radio compasses had to be installed and calibrated. Simmonds boost controls created problems, when the engines were run up to war emergency power, because of sticking. So the oil in them had to be changed until "oil clarifiers" could be installed. The carburetors were also still acting up. After approximately 100 hours the "pop-off" valve retaining nuts would loosen, so every engine had to be retorqued. In all, it can be said that the ground crews did an excellent job in getting the P-51s ready for deployment, as all aircraft were able to depart Grenier on schedule.

The three squadrons staged through Chanute Field, Illinois, and then picked up the route that the 62nd FS had flown a year and a half earlier. At Whitehorse, YT, Lt. C.J. Murry undershot his landing approach and wiped out 44-64364. Because the weather at Ladd fell below landing minimums, the 82nd FG was forced to divert to Big Delta, AK, arriving there on April 12. Lt. Evans, of the 95th FS, landed too fast and collided with the preceding Mustang, flown by Lt. Homfeld, which destroyed 44-64519 and required a wing change on the other P-51H.

Upon arrival at Ladd the next day, all pilots were briefed on "possible encounters with enemy forces." All Mustangs were armed, and missions were immediately dispatched to Nome, Anchorage, Galena, and Tanana for area familiarization.

Conditions were extremely rough on the 82nd FG while they were in Alaska. While the weather was an improvement over the climatic conditions some of the pilots had experienced when they were there with the 62nd FS, other things had deteriorated. The lack of available support facilities and personnel created morale and personal hardships within the 82nd FG. The BASUT at Ladd took a minimum of a week just to do an individual's laundry. Mail was often two weeks late. Equipment to work on the Mustangs was in poor condition or nonexistent. Ground vehicles were without heaters or working defrosters. The heaters in the hangars were broken, and most of the lighting circuits in the hangars and shops were shorted out. Nevertheless, the group managed to fly 3357:45 hours, with each squadron getting in more than 1100 hours of time. They fired 16,216 rounds of .50-caliber ammunition on gunnery missions and dropped 292 500-lb. bombs on the target range or on the Tanana River, for flood control.

Navigational difficulties were still the hostile enemy that the 62nd FS had encountered. On May 6 two pilots, Lt. G.D. Page, flying 44-64375, and Lt. Grady Morris, in -416, became lost and eventually were forced to crash-land near Stevens Village, Alaska. They were both declared missing, but were found and rescued by the 10th Air Rescue Squadron the next day.

Severe maintenance and aircraft problems continued. Lt. Walter Dillard, III, of the 97th FS ground-looped and wiped out 44-64173 on May 11 at Ladd. Lt. Jewell of the 95th FS collapsed his landing gear, which wrote off -473, with only 279 total flying hours. It was claimed that this aircraft would have been repairable if adequate support equipment had been available. The 96th FS was not free from accidents either as Lt. Dixon landed on the runway lights and Lt. Hirsch's landing gear collapsed.

Serial numbers are unknown.

But the biggest problem with these Mustangs was their own structural integrity. Some of the P-51Hs were literally cracking under pressure. All aircraft were inspected for buckling wings and were restricted to 2½ g's. Cracks were found in the rib assembly, wing stations 17.2725 and 31.375. Cracks also were found in the wing center webbing at station 0 and at 1.25 on nearly all the Mustangs. The 97th actually was forced to restrict all of their aircraft to straight and level flight because of wing wrinkles.

(It has been reported, by the proverbial "reliable source" that these fatigue cracks were induced by pilots overstressing their Mustangs in combat along the Bering Strait. It is known that both the 57th and 82nd Fighter Groups flew armed patrols in this area. However, no written evidence has come to light indicating that combat was actually entered. I expect that such actions will never be officially confirmed.)

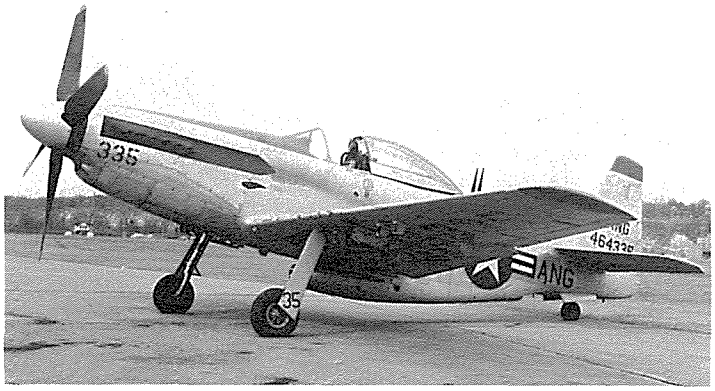
By June the tension alleviated. The Berlin situation became the focal point, and the threat of war in the Alaskan Theater abated. The 82nd FG's squadrons had previously kept all of their Mustangs with "hot guns," but after the 23rd, only three aircraft from each squadron were kept armed and on alert status. On June 25 the alert was cancelled entirely and with relief the group prepared for the trip back to Grenier.

The 82nd FG was forced to fly back to the ZI in elements, as indicative of the times, the Canadian government did not want large groups of aircraft flying southbound over their country. A speed run was arranged by Col. Viccellio, the group's present commanding officer. The attempt was made by Capt. Robert W. Hopkins as flight leader, and Lts. Hal W. Johnson and Raymond Kleber. The route was through Edmonton, Alberta, and Minneapolis, Minn., for refueling. The speed run established a point-to-point record that will probably never be challenged—but covered 3800 miles in an elapsed time of 12:50, of which 11:15 was actual flying time. The speed averaged 335 mph, but would have been even faster if the flight had not been forced to deviate around thunderstorms in Upper New York State.

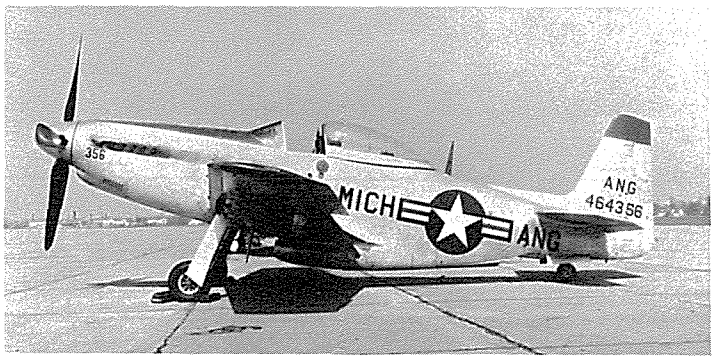
Upon the group's arrival they discovered that they were going to have to give up their P-51Hs for Ds. This caused some dissatisfied comments among the pilots and ground crews alike. "The pilots felt that the Hs were a better combat aircraft because of its inherent stability and ease of control. In addition, there wasn't as much cockpit space [in the D]." Maintenance crews disliked the Ds over the Hs "because it took three times as long to change radios and the cowlings. All of the accessories on the Ds are harder to get at than the H." The only advantage commented on was by the armorers who discovered it was easier to service the machine guns on the P-51D.

In July the 82nd FG put on its last major exhibition with the Mustang. Col. Viccellio led the 82nd as the lead unit in a massive flyover at Idlewild Airport (now Kennedy) at New York. This airshow was a part of the dedication of the new two-million-dollar airfield. With irony, it was strictly a military demonstration, as the airlines boycotted the affair in a fit of pique. They were feuding with the Port Authority of New York already.

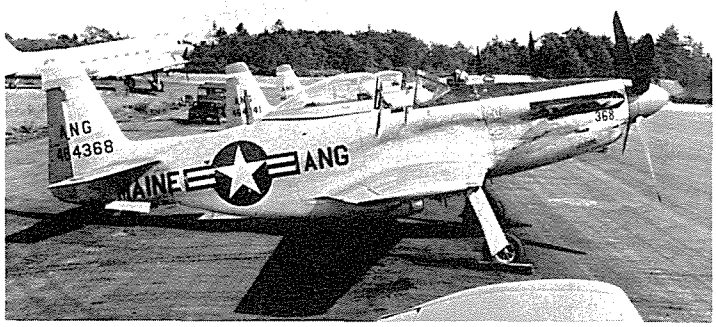
By the end of July the 82nd FG had received 63 P-51Ds. As required by regulations, all of the P-51Hs had to be given 100-hour inspections prior to their being transferred to other units. Also, at the direction of HQ SAC, the tail warning radar



44-64335: The sole P-51H assigned to the 109th FS, Minnesota Air National Guard at Minneapolis. (Logan Coombs via Dick Phillips)

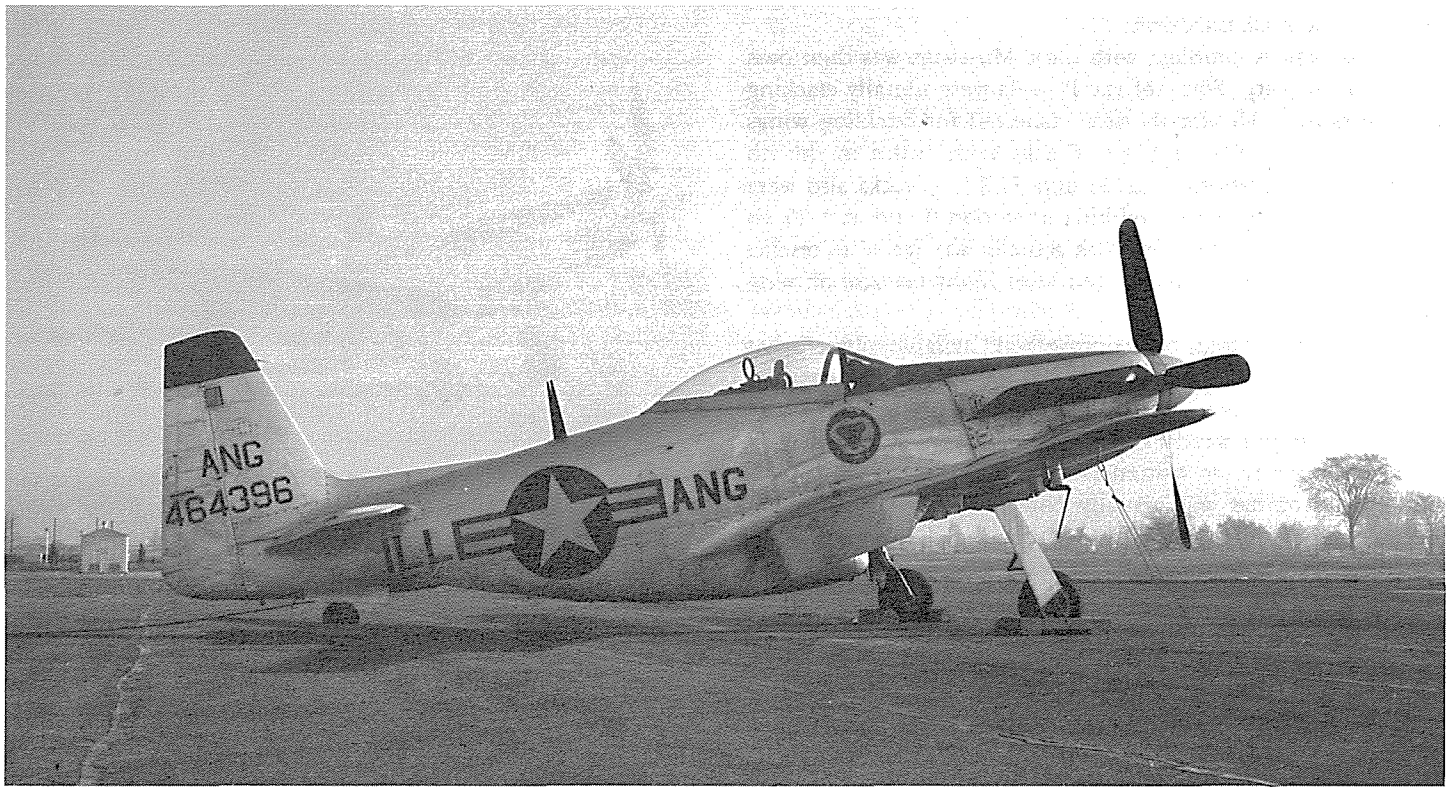


44-64356: After assignment to the Air National Guard many Mustangs were shifted around quite a bit. This one started with the 169th at Peoria, Illinois, transferred to the 171st at Detroit, Michigan, in 1952 and on to the 134th at Burlington, Vermont, in January 1953. (Air Force Museum, David Menard Collection)

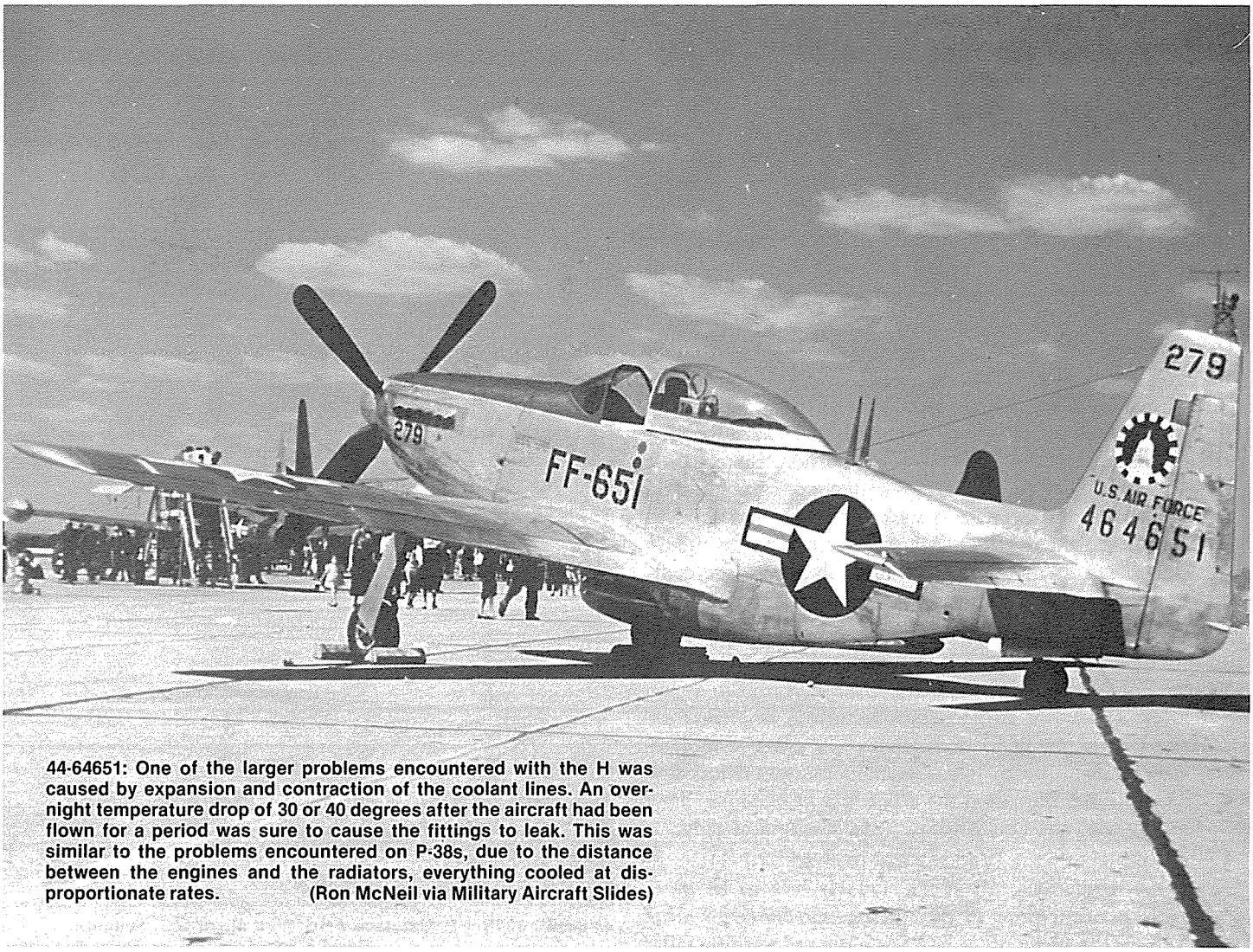


44-64368: 132nd FS, Maine ANG. Photographed at summer camp, Grenier AFB, NH. (Air Force Museum, David Menard Collection)

44-64505: 104th FS, Maryland ANG, pilot Major S.C. Souders. (David Menard via the Air Force Museum)



44-64396: And you have to get up mighty early to get a shot like this. 170th FBS, Illinois ANG. (Photo by Logan Coombs via Dick Phillips)



44-64651: One of the larger problems encountered with the H was caused by expansion and contraction of the coolant lines. An overnight temperature drop of 30 or 40 degrees after the aircraft had been flown for a period was sure to cause the fittings to leak. This was similar to the problems encountered on P-38s, due to the distance between the engines and the radiators, everything cooled at disproportionate rates. (Ron McNeil via Military Aircraft Slides)

had to be removed. Thus, the ground crews were exceedingly busy, because the arriving P-51Ds were in "deplorable" condition." Most of these Ds came from the 27th FG, which was now converting to P-82s, and apparently the men didn't bother to show much loyalty to their original unit, considering what they fostered off on them.

The majority of the 82nd FG's P-51Hs were transferred to the Ohio National Guard under Project ANG-61. Six more were transferred back to the 63rd FS, 56th FG, for use as target tugs. Five were sent to the 1100th Air Base Group at Bolling Field for pilot proficiency usage. As mentioned earlier, 44-64192 went to the Navy. The remainder were allocated to the Air Training Command at either Peyote or Williams, under Projects TRC-41 or GRI-967.

During the two years which SAC flew the P-51H they lost 24 of the Mustangs to accidents or other operational causes. One of the parting comments made by the 82nd FG historian was that the Hs were "weary."

ALASKAN AIR COMMAND

The Alaskan Air Command (AAC) obtained the P-51H from the Air Materiel Command depot at Spokane, Washington. It was at Spokane where the Mustangs received the necessary modifications to their engines and cooling systems to operate in the colder climates. The P-51Hs were transferred to the 57th Fighter Group under Project AAC-3.

The 57th FG replaced, in number, the 343rd Fighter Group. This was done under postwar criteria of only retaining low numbered units, and did not reflect any movement of personnel or aircraft. The 57th FG official history begins on August 15, 1946, the date of the numerical change. Major Benjamin H. King was the Commanding Officer, and still under wartime restrictions; the address was listed as APO 729, Seattle. The 343rd FG was originally a P-38 unit composed of the 11th, 18th, 54th, and 344th Fighter Squadrons. (The 11th, 18th, and 344th officially were deactivated on August 15. The 54th had deactivated the previous March at Attu.) The 18th is sometimes credited as flying P-51s out of Ladd, but this cannot be substantiated.

As the 343rd was headquartered at Sheyma, on the far end of the Aleutian Chain, so was the 57th FG in its early months. The 57th continued to be composed of its WWII squadrons, the 64th, 65th, and 66th FSs. Their role also continued as the 343rd had—the defense of Alaska.

For a moment's digression, the island of Sheyma is worth a bit of description to "get the feel" of what the 57th FG and their Mustangs had to contend with.

Sheyma is known by many GI names, of which about the only printable one is "Black Pearl," alluding to its volcanic composition. Winds consistently are in excess of 40 knots for weeks at a time. They also always appear to blow at 90° to the single runway. (There was an emergency landing strip also, but to use it required towing the aircraft two and a half miles.) Only 60 inches of snowfall is the average, but it is claimed that it falls horizontally! During the summer months the winds abate, but the temperature rarely exceeds 45° and low ceilings prevail. For example, in July the weather averages 27 days where the ceilings are 200 feet or less, with visibilities usually below one-half mile.

The first P-51Hs began to arrive in August 1946. The first two went to the 64th FS, and the second two to the 66th. It was an

44-64478: Insofar as known, there were only two aerobatic teams to fly the P-51H. This team, the "Rainbows" from the 131st FS, was led by Capt. (now Colonel) John Sevila with Lts. Fred Johnson and Al Mateia on the wing and Lt. Charlie Rossiel in the slot. This photograph of Sevila gives a good indication of the relative size of the Mustang. Team aircraft did not bear any special markings.
(Photo via Albert A. Eldridge, Massachusetts Air National Guard Historical Association)

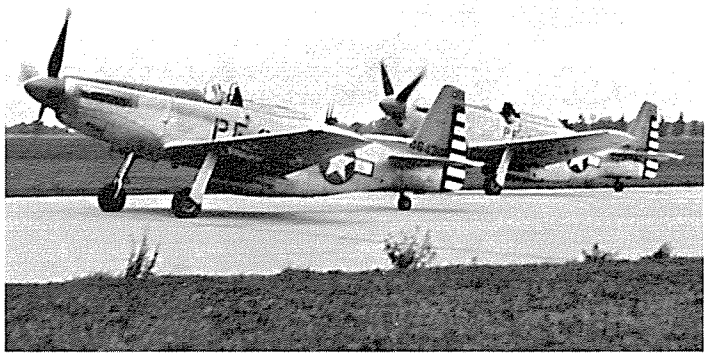
inauspicious beginning as, on August 23, 44-64511 crashed on Sheyma when the pilot attempted an emergency landing as a result of a rough-running engine and collapsed the landing gear.

As a result of discharges and rotation of the troops, the personnel sections of the 64th and 66th FSs were forced to combine, and then combine once again with the Headquarters Section of the 57th FG itself. The 1883rd Aviation Engineer Squadron was ordered in October to commence construction of dependent housing. This news was greeted with enthusiasm by the men who remained, for the only women on Sheyma were a few officers' wives and a couple of nurses. By the end of October eight more Mustangs had arrived, and all of the remaining P-38s were ordered scrapped by Headquarters Alaskan Air Command.

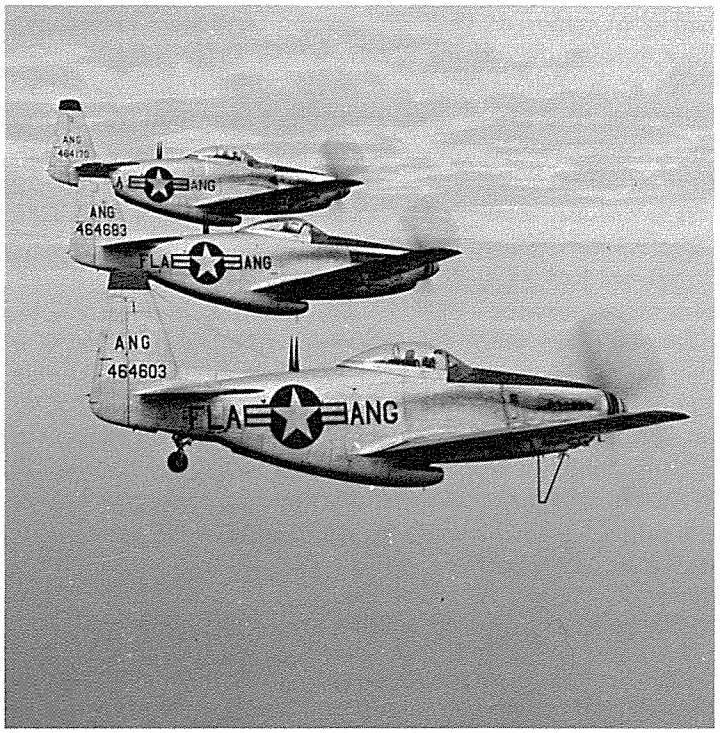
November brought the official assignment of Mission; fighter defense of the Aleutian Chain; fighter support; assisting the 65th FS in its role as an RTU; and assisting the Army in ground defense. All P-51s found themselves grounded because modifications to the propellers, as required by Tech Orders, resulting from Capt. Wildberger's 56th FG accident, had not been accomplished.

In December, the 64th FS began total consolidation with the 66th FS. This was a result of further rotations and transfers of men back to the ZI. The 57th FG was now considered critically short of personnel. The Mustangs were released for flight near the end of the month, but due to the short amount of time remaining and the winter weather only 67 hours were flown in the fighter.

Lt. Col. Harry L. Downing became the new 57th FG Commanding Officer in January 1947. He continued the same policies of his predecessor. The 66th FS now had 11 Mustangs and were able to build up 160 hours of flying time. This was a goodly amount of time considering the weather, and because the maintenance crews could only manage to keep seven of the aircraft operational due to parts shortages. One Mustang was lost during the month when 44-64190 was written off at Adak. Adak, by the way, was the nearest suitable alternate to Sheyma. Three



44-64411: P-51Hs of the 56th FG prepare for takeoff. Tail stripes are red and white with a blue vertical. (Roger Besecker Collection)



44-64603: Returning from the gunnery range. Observe that -603 has the tow-target rig attached to the starboard bomb rack. The cable for the target was attached to the rack and was released by arming and pressing the bomb release button. The rig was attached to the right wing so as to work against the propeller torque. This type towing arrangement was developed by the 82nd FG, and was found to be far superior to the earlier types. (Photo courtesy Lt. Col. Robert G. Mason, 159th FS, 125th FG, Fla. ANG)

hundred and forty miles is a long way to fly when you're hurting for fuel in that climate!

Due to many factors, as the previously mentioned weather, plus logistics and operational feasibility, it was decided by Headquarters AAC to relocate the 57th FG from Sheyma to Ft. Richardson, near Anchorage. The group's HQ detachment accomplished the move in April, and the 66th FS arrived in force on May 17. This was a welcome relocation to all the men in the unit, as they had been informed in January that all dependent housing construction was to be stopped. This action obviously caused quite a drop in morale. Particularly because any sort of recreation was virtually curtailed during the winter months on the island.

Prior to the relocation, during April the 66th FS had received an additional shipment of Mustangs, and became fully operational at combat strength. Total hours flown since the end of February was 1,301, which, again, was considered a goodly amount. Only flight tests had been flown in March as a result of adverse weather conditions and most of the Mustangs being grounded again for propeller modifications.

Due to flooding brought on by spring thaws, the 65th FS, which was based at the 26 Mile Field, a satellite of Ladd (26 Mile Field was later named Eielson Air Force Base), commenced some realistic bombing practice in their role as the group's RTU. They flew ice-bombing missions against the Kuskowia River, near McGrath Field, where the river's backwaters threatened to submerge the airstrip. After three missions to McGrath, they flew two additional strikes to the Yukon River, bombing near Galena for the same purpose. Total expenditure was 32,000 pounds of 250- and 500-pound bombs. Press releases in the local newspapers indicated that the public was not only impressed by the accuracy of the bombing, but grateful for its effectiveness.

During the summer months a "Post Information and Education Program" was implemented within the group at the direction of HQ AAF. The first message created quite a furor among the troops for it was a different era. This program concerned integration of blacks into the AAF, and is quoted, "If the colored man is brought into close, prolonged contact with them—the white man—they will not reenlist under any circumstances."

There was one reported accident in June. On the morning of June 12, Capt. Goodman and Lt. McKuskey departed Ft. Richardson on a navigational training mission. When it was discovered that they were overdue, a search mission was flown along their route of flight. Within a few hours they were spotted on the tundra, but both pilots were injured rather severely as a result of bailing out of their Mustangs which had collided. Since this was the group's first instance of where the pilot had to leave his disabled aircraft, the facts surrounding the incident were closely watched by the other pilots. It was determined that the issued parachutes were of too small a diameter to permit a safe descent for a pilot wearing all of his required survival equipment. The 57th FG demanded larger parachutes, and were issued 24-foot-diameter types, but tests proved that these also were too small, and after much foot stomping finally received 28-foot-diameter chutes, which were deemed satisfactory.

July passed with nothing out of the ordinary occurring, but August saw the reactivation of the 64th FS. The 64th was to be stationed at Marks Field, Nome, and just 150 miles from mainland Russia. It was requested that 18 P-51Hs that were in storage in the depot at Anchorage be given to the new squadron while the remainder of the required equipment would be transferred from the storage depot on Sheyma where the group had left it. Major William Norris was named Squadron Commander.

As the international political situation was becoming an item of serious consideration Col. Downing commenced lecturing his command on the subject. Listeners described the message as "non-pacific." It was Downing's explanation that the 57th Fighter Group was the only tactical outfit in Alaska, and all of the men were now assigned a 40-hour work week, with Sundays and Wednesdays off. All three-day passes were canceled, and a

maximum effort was commenced in increasing pilot proficiency in instrument and night-flying conditions.

On August 8, eight Mustangs from the 65th FS, plus 16 more from the 66th FS, flew the first 57th FG missions in combined tactical exercises with other combat units. They intercepted a force of B-29s of the 7th Bombardment Group over Summit, Alaska, and escorted them to Fairbanks. (The 7th BG [VH] was TDY from Ft. Worth AAF.) Again on August 15, the 57th FG launched another mission, this time in conjunction with the Navy. Nine Mustangs and one A-26 commenced reconnaissance operations against Navy Task Force 17, a submarine fleet operating off the Semide Islands. No contact was made with the subs because of extremely poor weather. One Mustang was lost during the period, when 44-64285 disappeared on August 14. Details of the incident are unknown, but it was finally found 20 miles west of Anchorage. (It was broken up by salvage crews in 1954.)

In September the 57th FG commenced small arms training for all of the enlisted men. Classroom lectures were also started on survival and toxic war gases. General Toohey Spaatz flew to Alaska and inspected the 57th, and was satisfied that they were ready for any eventuality. The group's complement of Mustangs was now at 60, but this was still short of the authorized number for three squadrons. The biggest problem, however, was just keeping the aircraft in commission. Twenty-five percent of the P-51Hs were down at any given time during the summer and fall months, due primarily to the seals in the hydraulic and fuel systems deteriorating after approximately 150 hours of flying time.

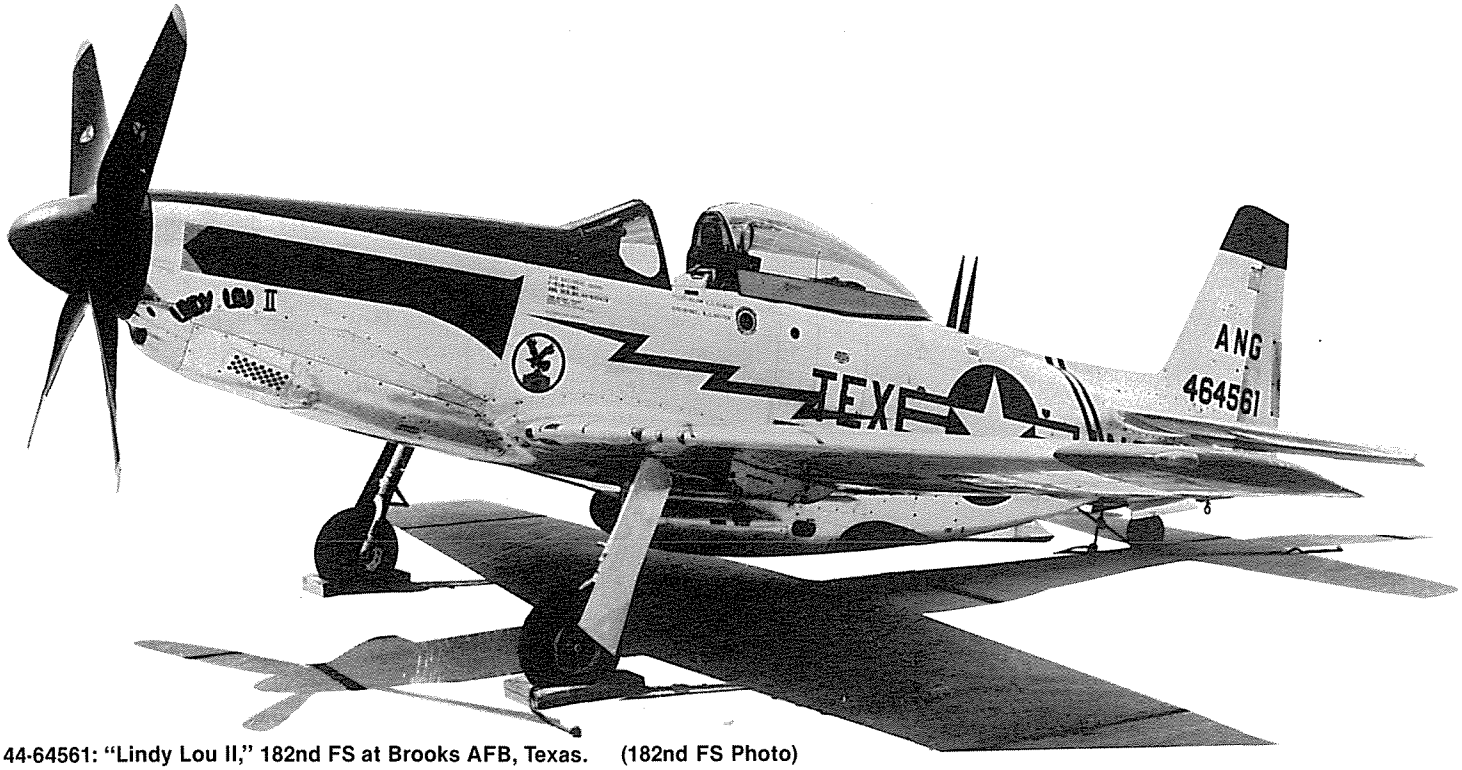
On November 14, Lt. Col. Downing relinquished command of the group to Col. Morton D. Magoffin. This action came as a result of the new Air Force policy of having full colonels as group commanders. Magoffin was an experienced fighter pilot, having been the first commanding officer of the 362 FG, and their first ace during WWII. He was also a graduate of West Point.

The advent of the second winter for the P-51Hs in Alaska saw improvements in the aircraft by way of in-the-field modifications. The Janitrol heaters were beefed-up to provide more heat. The cockpit was also fitted with a plug-in jack so that the pilots could wear electrically heated suits. To facilitate rescue in the event an aircraft was forced down, the group's fighters all received red paint jobs in the standard Arctic scheme. But the paint was removed in January because of the possibility of aerial combat.

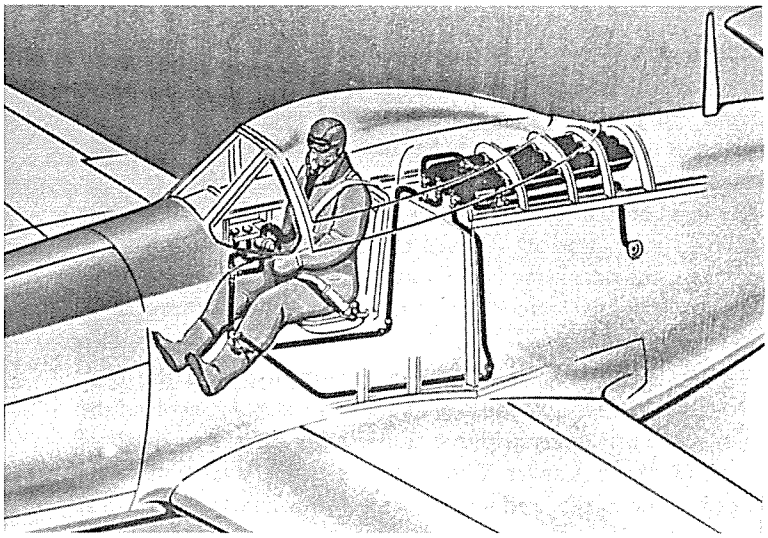
In view of the eventuality of possible combat, all of the Mustangs were readied for action. The center and outboard machine guns were armed with combat loads, and then safetied. The inboard guns were loaded with standard ball ammunition for gunnery practice.

Fighter missions were started in cooperation with the U.S. Army and "Exercise Yukon." This Arctic maneuver involved the deployment of the 2nd Infantry Division to Alaska in C-82s of the 62nd Troop Carrier Wing. The division was airlifted to Galena in the C-82s, and were provided simulated fighter escort by the 57th FG. This type mission created some operational problems for the Mustang pilots, as the C-82s flew strung-out in the "in-trail" type formations. Because of peacetime flying restrictions and the speed differential between the transports and the fighters it was felt that the C-82s did not really receive realistic escort coverage. Still, additional missions continued to be flown providing simulated combat support to the 2nd Infantry Division.

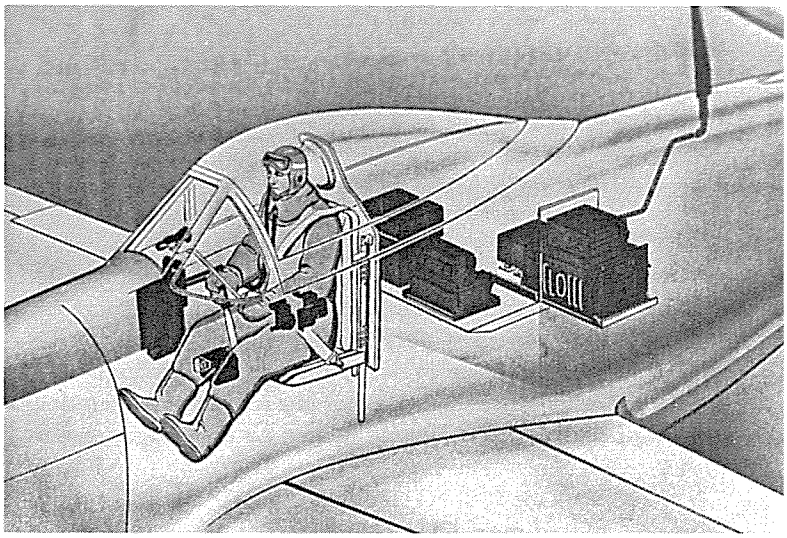
The month of March was when Stalin began flexing his muscles. On March 14 the 57th FG was ordered to become 100 percent combat ready. As the position of the 64th FS was considered to be untenable at Nome they were withdrawn to Fairbanks, where they arrived on March 17. Ground personnel at Nome not associated with the 64th, as AC&W controllers, were instructed on the method to evacuate Marks Field overland if required. They were also instructed not to fraternize with the Indians if they were forced to evacuate by surface transportation or on foot. The natives were reportedly communist sympathizers. All of the



44-64561: "Lindy Lou II," 182nd FS at Brooks AFB, Texas. (182nd FS Photo)



The oxygen system layout. A small door on the left side of the fuselage behind the battery compartment permitted charging the system with a minimum of effort. (McLaren Collection)



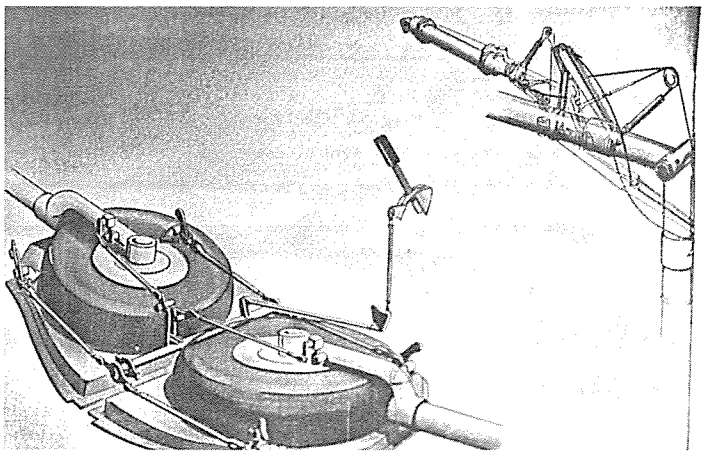
The radio and radar controls were all located on the pilot's right, while the equipment itself was easily accessible through a fuselage door. (McLaren Collection)

pilots in the group were briefed on the "USSR Battle Plan," which concerned both philosophy and tactics. Once again, in the ongoing P-51H saga, the tailwheels were made retractable.

Coinciding with their combat-preparedness role came the requirement to transition into a new type of fighter. The acquisition of ex-94th Fighter Squadron P-80Bs occurred almost simultaneously with the combat alert, requiring rigorous studying of Pilot's Dash-1s and new maintenance techniques and procedures by the ground crews. All of this activity was greeted with mixed emotion by those concerned, as everyone wanted the new jet-propelled fighter, but they weren't given much time to learn its idiosyncrasies when the training had to be combined with operational necessity.

The 65th FS became the first Mustang squadron in the group to become operational with the P-80. While the 65th was making the transition the other two squadrons rotated roles, with one on full alert status with loaded guns and full external fuel tanks. The other squadron "stood down" and made a show of "things as usual" for the civilian populace. The off alert squadron hosted the second annual Boy Scout Encampment, and again bombed ice jams for flood control.

The landing gear on the H is much smaller and correspondingly lighter than on previous models. The system is hydraulically operated and features a bungee-cord to bypass the system for emergency extension. (McLaren Collection)

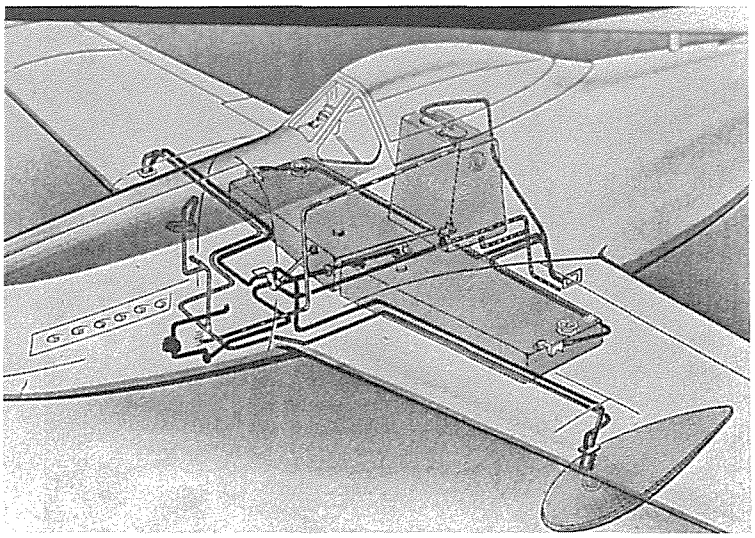


Some of the 57th FG records are evasive for the time period coinciding with the alert. The 64th FS, for instance, had two flights of four Mustangs participate in an unknown type of escort mission, of which three aircraft had to abort the mission because of engine problems. They also had two attacks on "ground installations" cancelled because of weather. A third mission was cancelled because of an accident on the runway. Whether all of these missions were in conjunction with Operation Yukon, or possible action against the USSR intruders, can only be surmised.

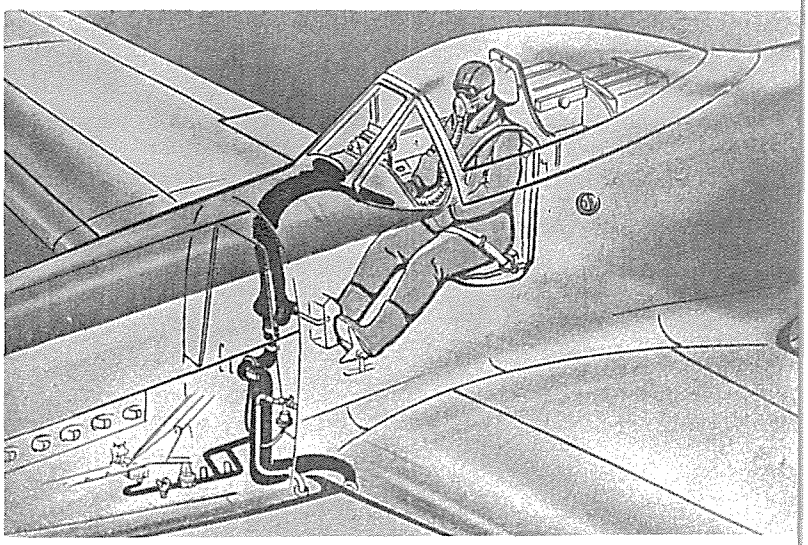
The 66th Fighter Squadron suffered four fatal accidents during the period the squadron was on alert. On April 9, Lt. Garret N. Johnson attempted an emergency crash landing on Fire Island, near Anchorage, and was killed. On April 13, Lt. Hubert Winborne crashed into Chickloun Bay as a result of a midair collision with an L-13 while on a night training mission. (Johnson was flying 44-64249, Winborne 44-64240.) On May 13 Capt. Earl Mundek and Lt. Richard Hipsack collided while on a high-altitude indoctrination flight over the Knik Arm of the Cook Inlet (44-64450 and -627). The price of preparedness came high.

Although four more Mustangs were written off in June (44-64162 and -430 from the 64th FS and -186 and -438 from the 66th FS), and two more in July (44-64628 from the 64th and -695 from the 66th), at least they were not fatal types of accidents. The 57th Fighter Group maintained full alert status through June 10 when the 64th and 66th FSs partially stood down to receive and transition into the P-80s.

Nothing reportable occurred with the P-51H in August. However, the 57th FG suffered its first fatal accident this month with the P-80. On August 31, Lt. Jim Labule, 65th FS, was making passes on the group's air-to-ground gunnery range when a fire warning light came on. He thought he could make it back home, but the Shooting Star exploded before he even had a chance to bail out.



The fuel system was self-sealing and could contain up to 475 gallons. (McLaren Collection)



The heating system produced 15,000 btu per hour. Fresh air, used for heating or ventilating, enters through a port in the left wing leading edge. Exhaust gases from the Janitrol heater exits through a louvered door on the right nacelle panel. (McLaren Collection)

On September 1 the 64th FS launched three flights of two P-51Hs on a VFR navigational mission to Nome and return to Ft. Richardson. "Fishtail Red Flight," composed of pilots Kennedy and Zeine, became lost and then force-landed 40 miles from Kotzebue when they ran out of fuel. They were soon rescued, but Col. Magoffin was so incensed over the breach of air discipline that he grounded the entire group and forced the men to perform close-order drill.

The 57th Fighter Group continued in the semi-alert configuration until September 6, when the international situation was deemed calm enough to cancel the alert altogether. At this time all of the group's aircraft were temporarily grounded and attention was directed toward classroom and OJT training on the new jet fighters by all affected personnel, the 64th and 66th FSs receiving new P-80Cs at this time. The transition was made as quickly as possible, and as soon as the maintenance crews could prepare the Mustangs for ferry flights they were sent back to the States. These P-51Hs were transferred to the Air National Guard under Project ANG-149, which allocated aircraft to the 113th FS at Stout Field, Ind., and the 181st FS at Dallas, Texas. Under Project ANG-143, Hs went to the 162nd FS at Dayton, Ohio. By the end of September, only 11 Mustangs remained with the 57th FG.

The 57th FG lost a total of 28 Mustangs in the two years they operated this fighter in some of the most adverse flying conditions known to man. It would be hard to state whether it performed any better or any worse than any other single-engined fighter would have under the conditions that were imposed upon it. It must be remembered that it was a combat aircraft operating in near combat conditions in a very rugged environment. The P-51Hs left Alaska on a sad note, as three were lost, along with one pilot, on ferry flights to the ANG.

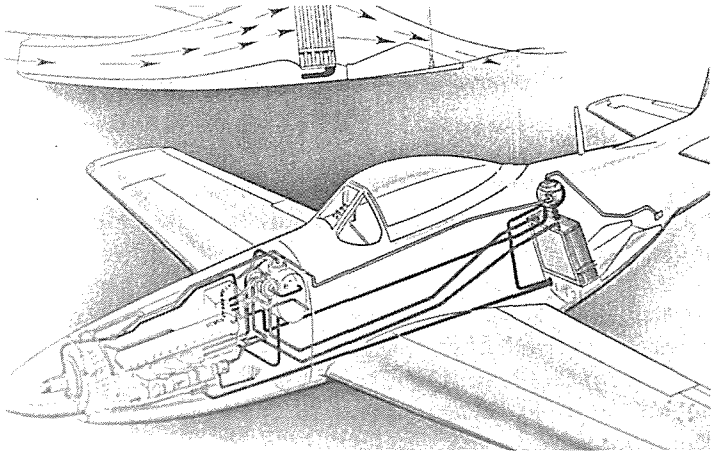
THE ANG

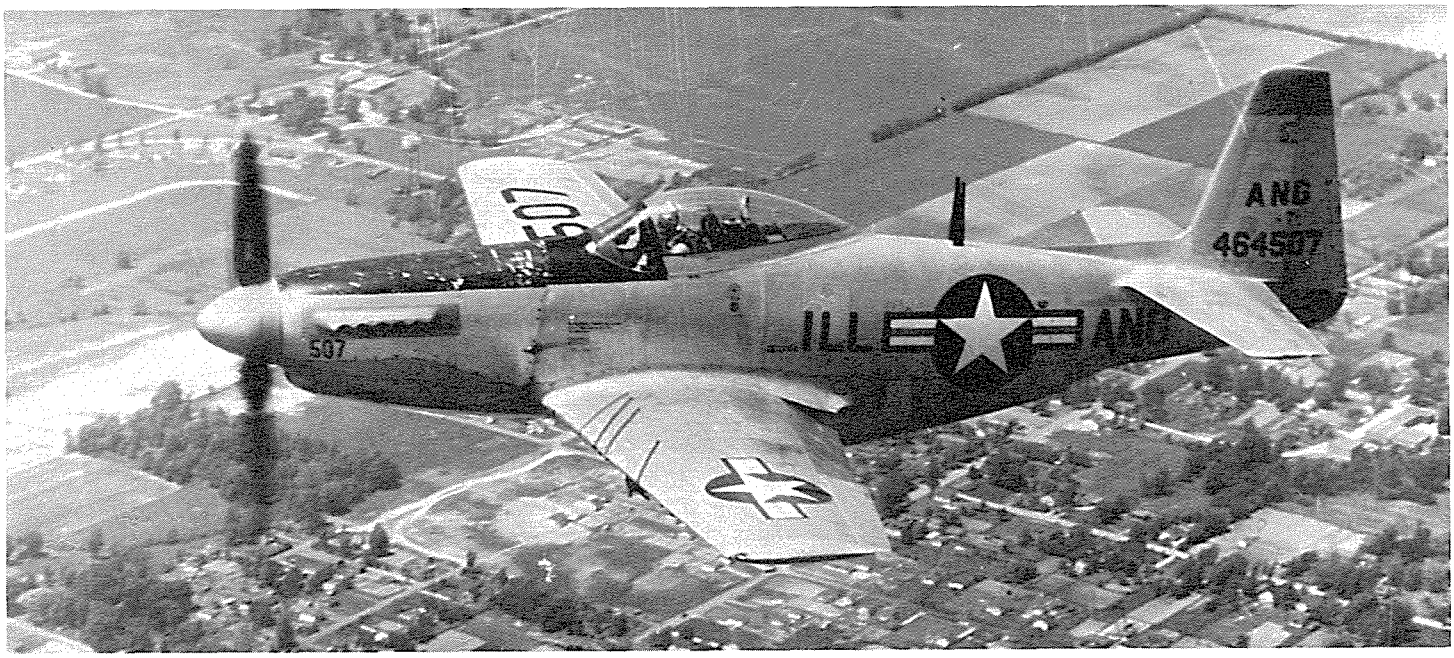
The role of the P-51H in Air National Guard service continued for six years. The 164th FS of the Ohio ANG at Mansfield commenced receiving them from the 82nd FG in late 1948 and officially gave up their P-47s in July 1949. The last ANG squadron to fly the H was another Ohio unit, the 112th FS at Akron. Ohio also figured in another Mustang record of sorts. The 162nd FS may have amassed more flying time on Mustangs than any other ANG squadron, for they also flew P-51Ds for a time. They totaled up 29,196 hours in North American's warhorse.

Some ANG squadrons only received a token number of P-51Hs. The Minnesota Guard received one at each of its two squadrons. The Wisconsin Guard received two at each of their two squadrons. The 118th FS, at Windsor Locks, Conn., received six, and only flew them for six months. Those that received limited numbers used them for instructional aircraft, in case their crew chiefs might have to work on a transient. Those squadrons that flew the type in strength kept them for varying lengths of time, for as the Korean War ended the Air Force began allocating jets into the Guard as rapidly as possible.

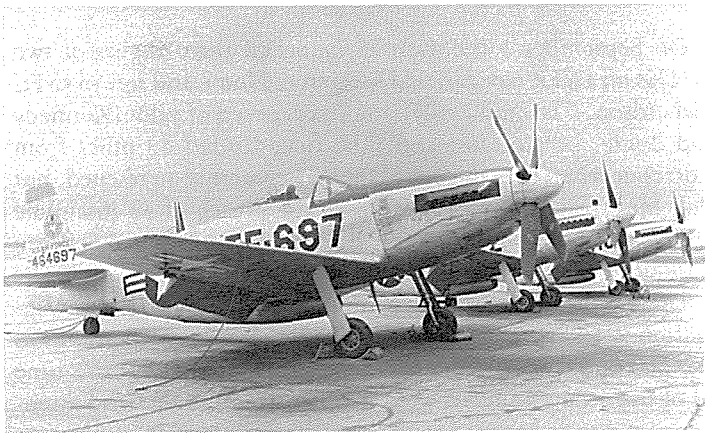
Following the onset of the Korean War the Air Force recalled from the ANG 95 P-51Ds for shipment overseas. This left many ANG squadrons short or depleted of aircraft. To fill this void, P-51Hs which had been stored at Kelly Field were transferred

Using the aftercoolant fluid to maintain proper oil temperature via a heat exchanger permitted the complete oil system to be mounted forward of the firewall. Thus, the system was protected by the engine and armorplate in the event of combat. (McLaren Collection)





44-64507: A Mustang of the 169th FBS photographed near the Greater Peoria Airport. Spinners were bronze-painted. (Brazelton via Menard)



44-64697: Hs of the USAF Air Controllers School. These aircraft were used to train both the FAA nee CAA air traffic controllers, back during the days when radar was just being phased into terminal areas, and USAF GCI/AC&W controllers. Photographed at Tyndall AFB, Fla. (USAF Photo via Col. John de Vries, USAF, Ret.)

into the ANG inventory. These Mustangs were flown to Burbank, Calif., where they were refurbished by Pacific Airmotive Corp., and then shipped to the Guard under Project ANG-153.

Eventually all ANG P-51Ds were returned to the Regular Air Force, but for many of these it amounted to only a paper transfer, as the owning ANG squadron was also activated and they took their aircraft with them. Less than a half dozen of the ANG squadrons were not officially activated, but they still received orders committing them to supplement the Air Force on a part-time basis.

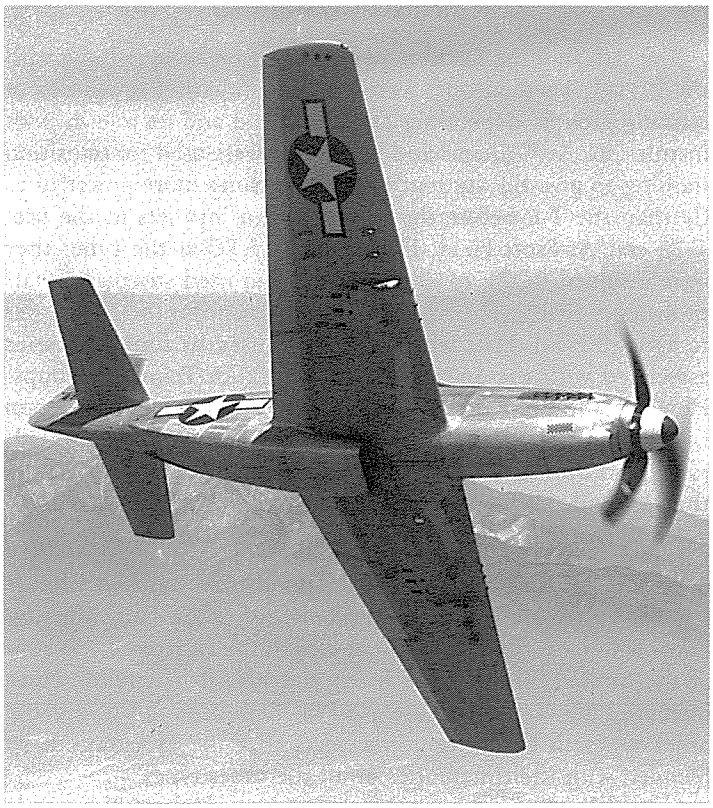
Squadrons, as the 169th FS at Peoria, Illinois, and 194th FS at Hayward, Calif., received these part-time commitments as relief squadrons to rebuilding undermanned and underequipped regular AF Air Defense Command units that were being reactivated but were not up to 24-hour capability. The Pennsylvania ANG 148th FS had surrendered their Thunderbolts in the fall of 1950, in exchange for H model Mustangs. They were activated into Federal Service on Feb. 1, 1951, and they transferred their Mustangs to the 146th and 147th FSs; also Pennsylvania ANG, but were units that were not called up. All of these Hs were brand-new, six-year-old aircraft.

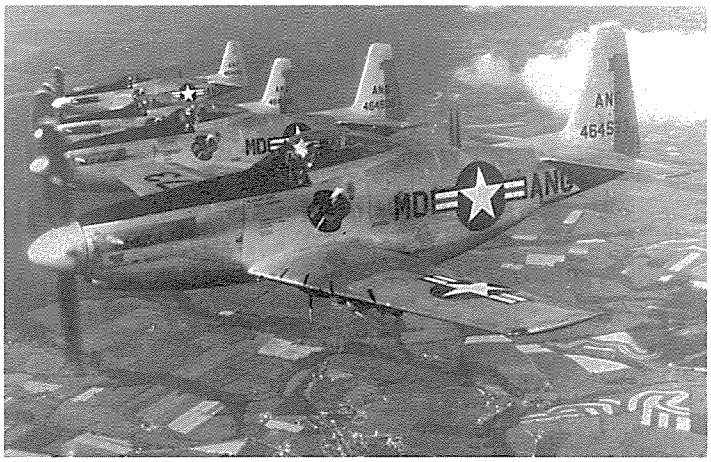
Rapid transitioning of aircraft types and roles was the watchword in the ANG during the Korean War era. The 133rd FS, New Hampshire ANG, was flying P-47s until activated on Feb. 1, 1951. Eighteen months later they returned to state control and received 24 P-51Hs to fulfill an ADC commitment as a VFR Interceptor Squadron. Eighteen months later they went all-weather when they obtained F-94s. This was typical, and certainly must have caused nightmares for crew chiefs, operations officers, and particularly supply sergeants: from radials to inlines, to jets, with afterburners and radar no less.

The 170th FS, Illinois ANG, had similar transitional problems but included rapid changes in roles. Prior to being activated they were flying P-51Ds, and returned to P-51Hs. As soon as they were truly operational with the H they were changed from a fighter-bomber squadron to interceptor squadron, with an assignment to protect St. Louis, Mo. (The squadron boasted that they could scramble two Mustangs in two minutes, and two more in six.) In 1954 they commenced receiving F-86Es, but within six months an F-84B was flown in (it is reported that the pilot said he would resign before he would fly that "hog" again) and their role was changed back to being a fighter-bomber squadron. The F-86s began being replaced with brand-new F-84Fs in February 1955, and for a short time there were three different types of fighters sitting on the ramp.

Six Guard squadrons which had flown the P-51H operationally were reequipped with P-51Ds when the Hs began being phased out. The 169th gave up their Hs for Ds in 1955, and then suffered what might be considered a psychological insult when the Mustangs were replaced with T-28s in 1956. These were the early model T-28As with the notoriously poor engines, and they had been stored in the open at Scott Field, Ill., until they were worse than tarnished—far below the standards of appearance most Guard squadrons kept their aircraft.

Flying the P-51H in the Guard was atypical of military flying during the postwar period. Both Air Force and Federal Regulations were hardly as stringent as they are today. Positive and Terminal Control Areas had not been envisioned. Pilots, justifiably,





The "Guardian Angels" aerobatic demonstration team of the 104th FS, Maryland Air National Guard. The team was composed of Capt. F.R. Scott, 1st Lt. Malcolm E. Henry, 1st Lt. William Marriott III, and Capt. Jesse D. Mitchell, Jr. Nose art on -573 is "Mighty Mouse" cartoon character. (104th Photo)

A classic view showing the clean lines of the last production version of the Mustang. (NAA courtesy of G.H. Balzer)

maintained the attitudes they needed to survive combat during the Second and Korean Wars. They were sharp, proficient, and had the necessary aggressive attitude. They were their own navigators, gunners, and bombardiers, and the only computers they had were the E-6B "prayer wheels." The P-51H, or other fighters, were the tools of their trade, but above all, the Mustang maintained the class of its heritage: it was *fun* to be a fighter pilot in those days.

The ANG squadrons were expected to maintain the same proficiency as the regular Air Force squadrons. The practice missions flown were of the same types as their counterparts and involved gunnery, navigation, bombing, and mock combat. Some of these were a comedy in a sense. Others were laced with tragedy. I witnessed a dog fight once that was just fantastic. The -51Hs twisted, turned, dived, and climbed, all in an amazingly small amount of air space. Their Merlins alternately snarled, whined, or popped with resounding backfires as the pilots jockeyed for position on each other's tails. But, unfortunately for the pilots involved, all of this maneuvering eventually carried them over downtown Springfield, Illinois, and the State Capitol building. This area also happened to be within the confines of the Capitol Airport Control Zone. The FAA (nee CAA) and the politicians did not enjoy my, or the pilots', enthusiasm for what transpired, and I understand they came down rather hard on the offenders.

One ANG pilot, allegedly from the 169th FS, inadvertently dropped his belly tanks while on a cross-country mission. They struck a church in Ohio, which fortunately was not then in use, because it burned to the ground. Another pilot, this time from the 101st FS, did the same thing over Boston, Mass. He scored one Studebaker, which also burned without injuries.

Two P-51Hs of the 131st FS had a midair collision. One pilot was forced to bail out, while the other one, flown by Col. Stefanik (now General) made an emergency landing. He is reported to have touched down at 200 indicated, having been forced to keep up a high airspeed to maintain control, as his right wing was severely damaged. Two pilots from the 170th FBS had a midair while on the gunnery range at Alpena, Michigan, during summer camp maneuvers. Lt. Paul Snow, flying the lead Mustang, had all of the control cables to the empennage severed when his wingman, Major Bob MacDonald, got in too close and sliced into him with his propeller. Both aircraft managed to land safely after several minutes of skillful but apprehensive flying. The mechanics took the engine from Snow's Mustang and installed it in Major MacDonald's. One back in service, and one, 44-64448, to the scrap heap.

Collisions are the bane of the pilot's existence, whether on the ground or in the air. Two P-51Hs of the New York ANG 138th FS collided while landing on the night of July 29, 1952. 44-64373's rudder, turtle-back, and right wing were virtually cut away by the propeller of -605. The status of the pilot was not reported, but the least he could have gotten away with was a severe headache, as -373's canopy was also smashed. Whether Regular Air Force or ANG, the price extracted for aerial supremacy could be high.

In all, 61 ANG squadrons flew the P-51H, or had at least one assigned to them for awhile. Actually, 12 squadrons had only one, and seven more had two. Twenty-two ANG squadrons were furnished with what was considered at the time to be full complement of 25 fighters. The other 10 squadrons averaged 10 Hs each.

OTHER DUTIES AS ASSIGNED

Quite a few P-51Hs were assigned to various bases across the country for pilot proficiency training. Others were used as hacks, and a few more went to ranking officers who thought they deserved such a steed for personal transportation. Andrews Field, Md., had the 1050th Air Base Group with 25 Hs, and Bolling Field had 13 more assigned to the 1100th ABG and eight more to the 1st BASUT, all for use by Washington-based pilots who needed to earn their flight pay.

Mission's End. 170th FBS returns from summer camp. (Photo by M/Sgt. Don Balweg)

Pilots of the 113th FIS race toward their Mustangs for a practice scramble out of Scott Field, Ill. The 113th was the only Air National Guard squadron, flying the -51H, to receive a full-time ADC commitment when recalled to active service during the Korean War. When returned to state control in 1952, the aircraft were turned over to the activating 85th FIS at Scott, who then became the only ADC squadron to fly the H. (*St. Louis Post Dispatch* Photo)

TRAINING COMMAND

The Air Training Command equipped eight squadrons with the P-51H. These aircraft were allocated to either squadrons or training groups, depending on the airfield and its role in pilot instruction. At Williams and Pyote they were used for transition training to give the student pilots something more powerful to fly than the T-6 before they were thrown into jets in the pre-T-28 era. At Scott Field, Headquarters ATC at the time, they were assigned to the 3310th BASUT, and used strictly for staff proficiency flying. The main ATC assignment for the P-51H was to Tyndall Field, Fla., where they were used by four squadrons associated with the 3625th and 3820th Pilot Training Groups. Here, in the pre-Korean War period they were used to train fighter pilots not yet selected for the few new jet fighter squadrons. And during the Korean War they continued to be used in this role and also for refresher training for Mustang pilots reactivated from the AF Reserve and Air National Guard.

At this point in time, obtaining pilot impressions of what it was like to fly the P-51H has become rather difficult. Meeting pilots who have flown it is rather rare in the first place, because of the limited numbers produced and placed in service. Their memories are vague, because most of them have flown so many other types in the intervening years that the H's traits have blended with their memories of all the other types.

One airline pilot I queried about the infamous Simmonds boost control had this to say, "Other pilots had problems with it, but I never did." The Simmonds provided a constant manifold pressure between 27″ and 60″ hg. If the engine was not stopped in the prescribed method, when it was restarted it would promptly run up to 60″ hg, and stand the Mustang on its nose. (Anytime the engine was run up to 40″ hg or more, the tail had to be tied down.) Needless to say, the offended pilot, crew chief, and maintenance officer usually went looking for somebody with blood in their eyes. Col. Ralph A. Bush, Chief, Air Division, Illinois ANG, recalled that the 170th FS didn't really have all that much problem with the boost. (But some of the pilots did stand their Mustangs on their noses while landing, according to the maintenance officer.) He did say, though, that

the biggest problems were with the Merlin engines, primarily with oil and coolant leaks. Col. Bush went on to say:

> "The -51H was a delight to fly. It was maneuverable and, of course, had plenty of power and speed. The fuselage tank that had caused such a problem in the 'D' model was not a factor in the H. Although jets are great and most enjoyable to fly, the 51 days will never be forgotten. Not only because it was such a great airplane, but the skies were less cluttered and restrictions fewer."

The P-51H, as all conventionally geared fighters, was virtually blind until the tail was up on takeoff. It was considered to be a comparatively long process to get the tail up, as power had to be added slowly, very slowly, because of the torque. The tail wheel was kept planted as long as possible to take advantage of the steering capabilities in directional control, particularly in crosswinds, and then the tail eased up just prior to liftoff. All this time it behooved the pilot to pay very close attention to everything he was doing, as it was not a time to get behind the airplane. (Over 50 percent of all P-51 accidents were caused by pilot error.)

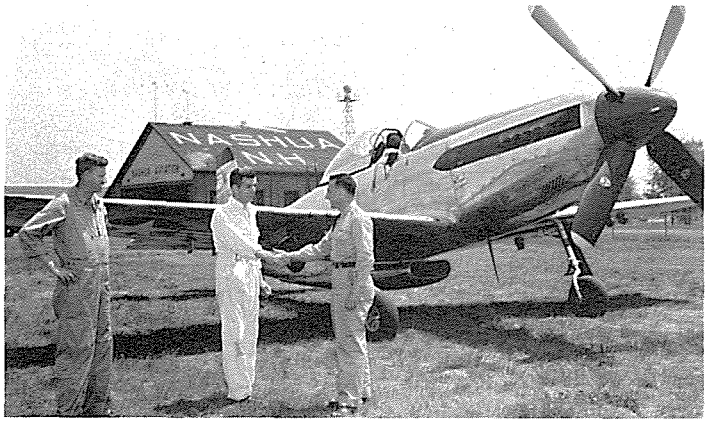
I am indebted to Col. John de Vries, USAF (Ret.), a writer and historian in his own right, for much of the following in respect to pilot techniques and impressions of the P-51H. John begins: "It is light on the controls and has discernible excess of power. In aerobatics it just 'bent around the pattern very easily.' In formation flying it was pure pleasure, at altitude the throttle would be full forward and the supercharger in use. To fly wing position the power adjustments were accomplished by minute propeller pitch changes. The standard 'show' position was two feet out from the other pilot's wingtip with your wingtip even with his stabilizer. Normal cruise speed at 10,000 is 220–230 indicated."

"On instruments the D was considered to be a bit better. It was less skittish because of the heavier controls. The H rated as 'average', but not difficult in the soup. The one problem could be with carburetor ice; since the Simmonds maintained the manifold pressure automatically it was difficult to determine if ice was building up until the engine started running rough.

"Inverted flight is prohibited for over 10 seconds because of the Merlin's oil system (and the ashtray emptying out). All other maneuvers, except for snaprolls and poweron spins, are authorized. In combat maneuvers the flaps could be used sparingly. If dropped 10 to 20 degrees they would give a momentary lift or tighten your turn. But if they were not retracted quickly they would kill off too much airspeed. One tactic was to throw the propeller pitch forward to give full low pitch, which would also increase RPMs and give a momentary slowdown and an increase in available horsepower for the next maneuver. Coupled with the flap extension, the flattened propeller blades furnished the minimum possible turning radius, but only momentarily, as it also put (you) on the fine edge of a high-speed stall."

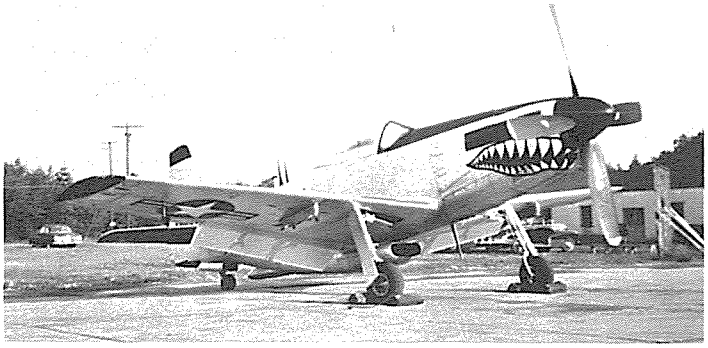
The high-speed stall in the P-51H is characterized by erratic buffeting of the elevators. At high angles of sideslip the buffeting showed itself in the vertical fin, which shook through the whole aircraft. Normal stalls are characterized by a slight buffet at two or three miles per hour above full stall. Usually the left wing would stall first, but there was no guarantee that the right wing wouldn't be the first, so attention to the warning was mandatory. The H would not spin as a result of a stall. In fact, to spin the airplane you had to deliberately fly it into one. This was not recommended, as it didn't prove anything, and the maneuver was quite an uncomfortable one for the pilot to

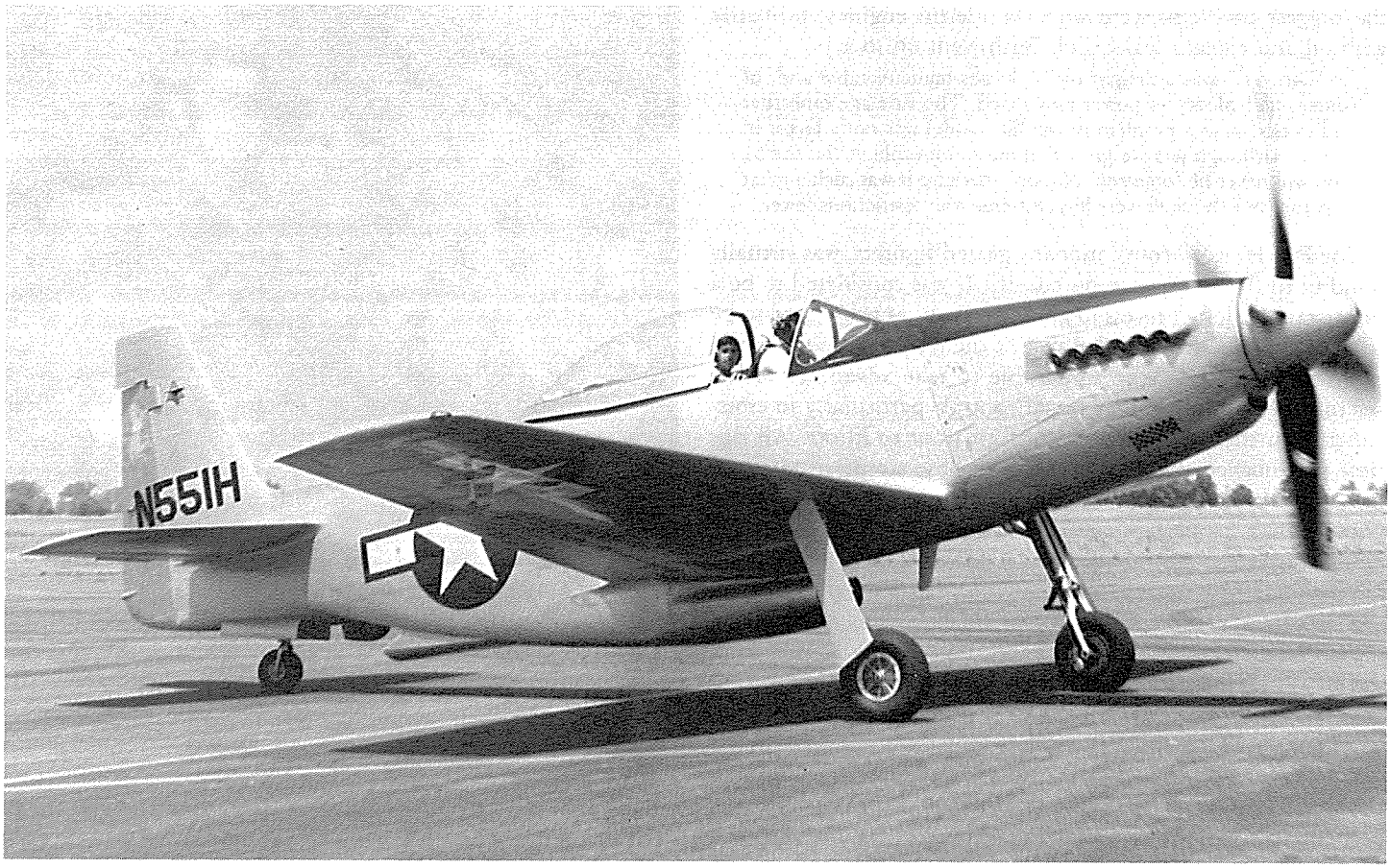
Col. Schilling welcomes Lt. Col. Gerald W. Johnson after Johnson brought the 62nd FS home from Alaska. P-51H 44-64506 is *Little Annie*. After Johnson became Commander of the 82nd FG, the kill markings were removed. (USAF Photo)



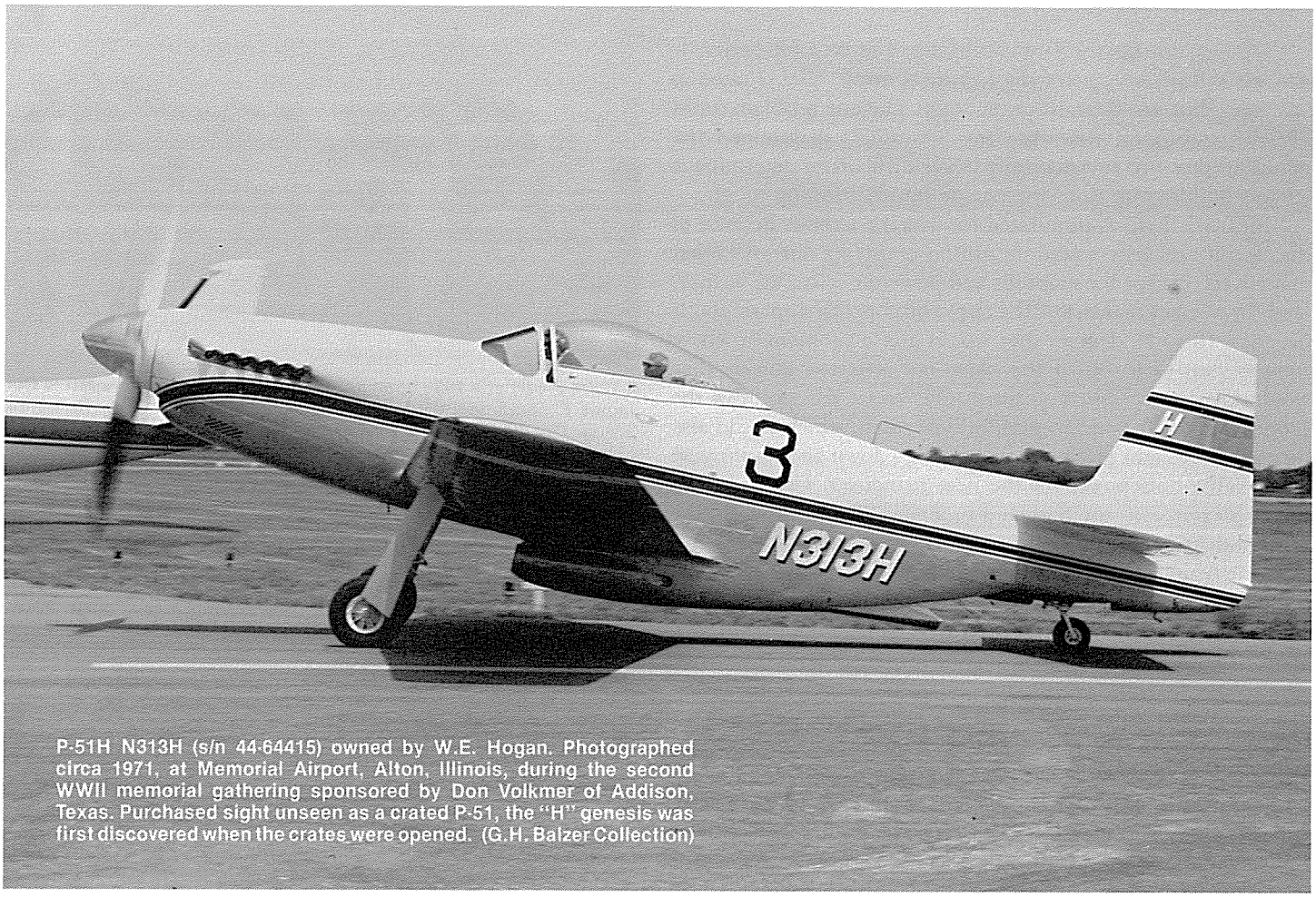
A 133rd P-51H at a 1953 open house at Nashua, NH. On the left is Col. James E. Cuddihee, present Commander of the 157th Air Refueling Group. On the right is Col. Paul R. Smith, the now-retired former 133rd Commander. Center is unknown. Col. Cuddihee, a captain at the time the photo was taken, now has more than 20,000 hours' flying time, which is believed to be an Air Force-wide record for active pilots. (157th ARG Photo)

44-64351 wearing a rather distinctive paint scheme. Attached to the 133rd FS, New Hampshire Air National Guard. (Roger Besecker Coll)





Mike Coutches arrives at the Merced Antique Airplane Fly-in June 6, 1970, in P-51H N551H. (Al Hansen)



P-51H N313H (s/n 44-64415) owned by W.E. Hogan. Photographed circa 1971, at Memorial Airport, Alton, Illinois, during the second WWII memorial gathering sponsored by Don Volkmer of Addison, Texas. Purchased sight unseen as a crated P-51, the "H" genesis was first discovered when the crates were opened. (G.H. Balzer Collection)

endure. The H would go into heavy and erratic oscillations or rolling with the possibility of losing up to 10,000 feet if the power was not immediately reduced.

The P-51H was rated as having a service ceiling of 42,000 feet. One pilot said he got that high once, but it took him all day to get there. Col. de Vries got one to 44,000 feet before anoxia overcame him as the result of the low-pressure oxygen system not being capable of forcing oxygen into his system. He came to, "going straight down with the aircraft porpoising and buffeting madly in compressibility. It required elevator trim and the engine idled to recover at 2,000 feet and 400-plus indicated." Maximum desired speeds were Mach .75, or 525 IAS. More power and speeds were attainable, but they had to be reported to the crew chief, and under peacetime conditions. The use of boost was not likely to make the pilot his crew chief's favorite person.

Landings were normally made from the 360° overhead type approach with initial altitude at 1,200 above ground level and at 250 IAS. The "break" is a 90° turn, and the "hot rods" pulled four g's, but normal pilots usually pulled two. (Wingmen broke at four-second intervals.) After the pitchout, or break, the throttle was retarded to idle, and coupled with the turn, the speed was bled off to gear and flap extension limits on downwind. Base leg was turned abeam of the end of the runway and the flaps were dropped to full with the nose lowered to maintain 140 IAS on the dogleg to final. The airspeed dropped to 120 on final with the intention of holding 100 IAS "over the fence." Touch down was planned at 80 IAS, as the normal stall was at 75, and the extra speed was for the wife and kids (landing accidents constituted one-half of all major accidents in the Mustang), plus the desire for a smooth touch down if anybody was watching. Since the H's increased empennage made it less "snaky" in the landing attitude, as it had more area out of the wing/fuselage blanketing effect, it was smoother in the flareout. In a three-point configuration the D's speed would play off and it would settle rapidly, whereas the H, being lighter, would float, permitting the pilot to make more comfortable last-minute corrections. Also, it was standard practice to make wheel landings if the runway was long enough to permit it. The visibility was better, and in the event of a last-minute go-around, it was safer to add power from this attitude, because of the ever-present torque factor.

REMAINING P-51Hs

There are two Hs still in the Air Force inventory, although legally they belong to the Air Force Museum (as do all display aircraft on Air Force, Air National Guard, and Air Force Reserve Bases). 44-64265 is at Chanute AFB, Illinois, where it has been since April 27, 1949. It was originally assigned to the 3502nd Training Squadron as a Class Ø12 aircraft for training purposes. It has now been downgraded to Class Ø26 because of the incurred stress and strain imposed upon it by years of fledgling mechanics trying out their new skills. At Lackland AFB, Texas, is 44-64376. This was one of the brand-new, six-year-old Hs assigned to the ANG after the Korean War activation of D model Mustangs. Refurbished at Burbank, it served with the 139th, 138th, and 139th again, of the New York Air National Guard. It was put on display at Lackland in early 1955.

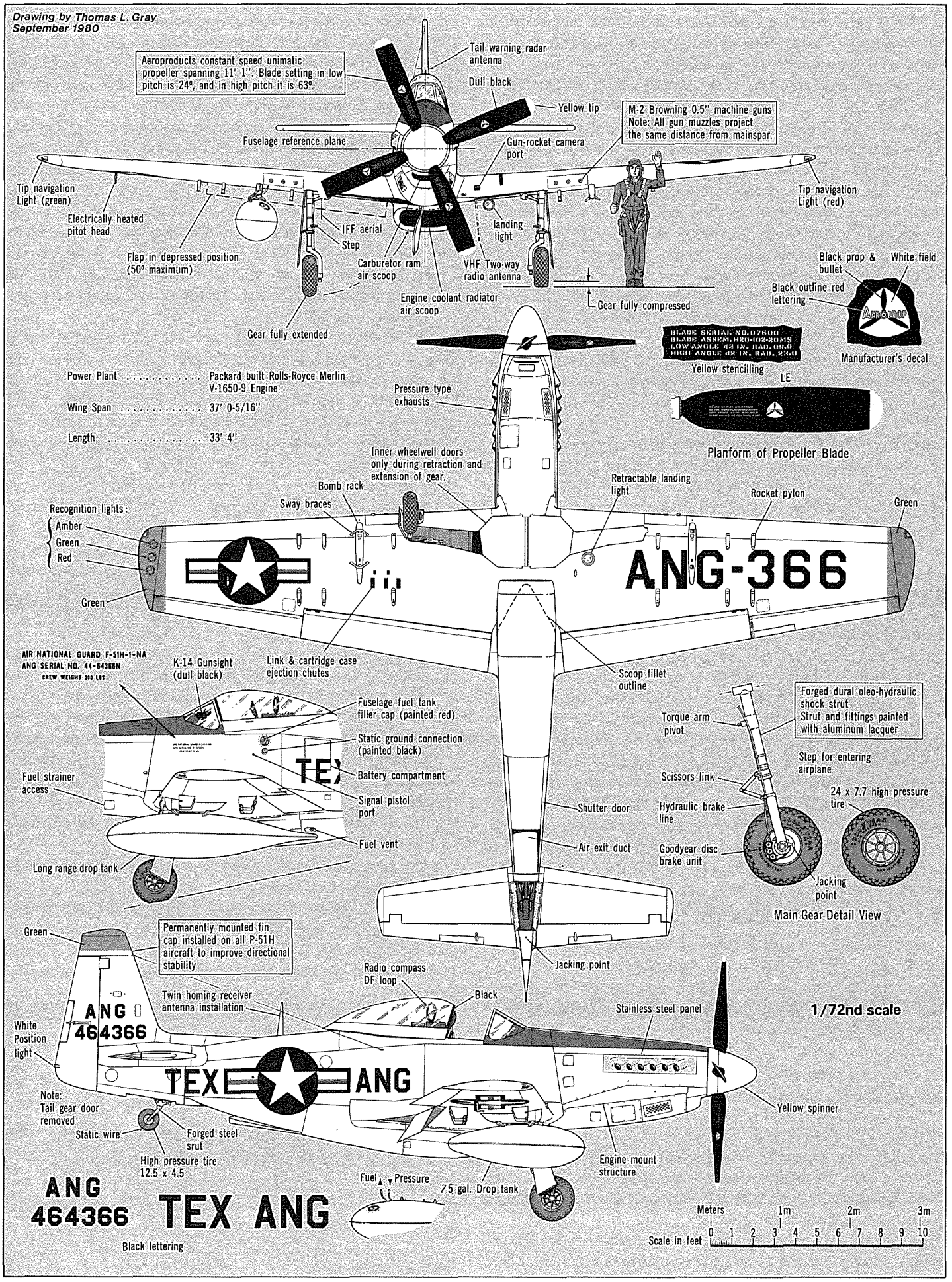
At the time of this writing, there is only one P-51H still flying: N551H, owned by Michael Coutches of Hayward, Calif. It is registered under the serial number of 44-64314. This serial number is reported to be somewhat spurious, as it is claimed that the aircraft has been constructed from airframes collected from locations across the country. The real -314 was displayed at the Air Force Museum in the late 1950s and early '60s, and then given to an American Legion Post in Ohio as a display aircraft. Its previous history saw it assigned to various Training Command Bases and eventual assignment to the 112th FBS, Ohio ANG. A second H is presumed to be a part of N551H's makeup. It is 44-64203. -203 served with the 66th FS, 57th FG in Alaska, and then was assigned to Post #7941 at the Ohio ANG in Miamisburg, Ohio. It later was transferred to the New York ANG and the 139th FS was its last home. It was also given to the American Legion as a display aircraft, this time at Geneva, New York. They sold it to an unknown buyer. At any rate, Coutches refuses to disclose any information.

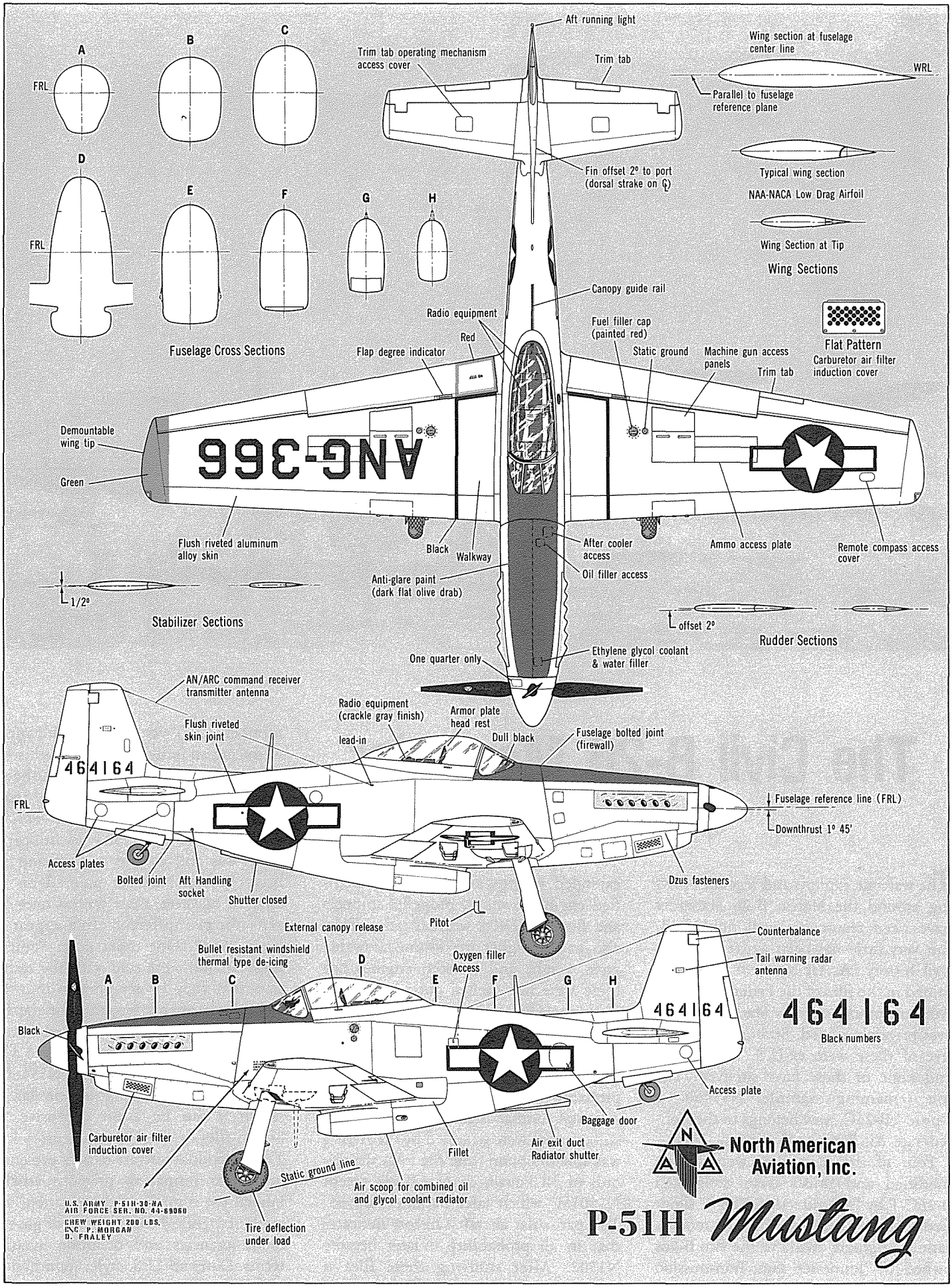
The second civil H is N46WB, nee N313H, registered with the FAA as 44-64415, which in all probability is also a bogus number. It was claimed that this aircraft also came from the Ohio ANG via an American Legion Post. However, -415's records are more than a little muddled. According to one Air Force computer runoff, -415 was given to NACA, and they retired it in May 1951, after applying only 106 hours of flying time. Every other source states that -415 was NACA130 and that NACA was still flying the aircraft in 1958. Thus the history of N46WB is obscured, probably intentionally. N46WB was severely damaged at Reno, Nevada, in September 1978, but owner Bill Whittington estimated that it would once again be flying sometime during the fall of 1979.

The third civilian P-51H, N67149, 44-64375, does have a pedigree. It was delivered to the AAF on Oct. 2, 1945, and arrived at Kelly on the 10th. It passed through the Spokane Modification Depot for winterization modifications, and then was assigned to the 56th Fighter Group, when the 56th re-equipped with P-80s, and the 82nd FG reactivated -375 was transferred to the 96th Fighter Sqdn. at Grenier. It participated in the mass mission to Ladd Field, Alaska. It was crash-landed at Steven's Village, Alaska, on May 6, 1948, when its pilot, Lt. G.D. Page, and his wingman became lost and were forced down out of fuel. With only 466 hours of flying time it was written off by the Air Force and abandoned.

Steve Meyers, of Chelan, Washington, and owner of Airpower Inc., recovered what scavengers, hunters, and vandals had left behind of -375 in 1975. He is now in the process of an expensive and extensive rebuilding program. The process included using recovered parts of the ill-fated "Fishtail Red" flight. The estimated time of departure for the newest P-51H has not yet been determined.

For additional information and corrections to the P-51H article see News & Comments.


Drawing by Thomas L. Gray
September 1980
Aeroproducts constant speed unimatic propeller spanning 11' 1". Blade setting in low pitch is 24°, and in high pitch it is 63°.
Tail warning radar antenna
Dull black
Yellow tip
M-2 Browning 0.5" machine guns
Note: All gun muzzles project the same distance from mainspar.
Fuselage reference plane
Gun-rocket camera port
Tip navigation Light (green)
Electrically heated pitot head
Flap in depressed position (50° maximum)
IFF aerial
Step
Carburetor ram air scoop
landing light
VHF Two-way radio antenna
Engine coolant radiator air scoop
Gear fully extended
Gear fully compressed
Tip navigation Light (red)
Black prop & bullet
White field
Black outline red lettering
Manufacturer's decal
BLADE SERIAL NO.07800
BLADE ASSEM.H20-402-20MS
LOW ANGLE 42 IN. RAD. 09.0
HIGH ANGLE 42 IN. RAD. 23.0
Yellow stencilling
LE
Power Plant ..... Packard built Rolls-Royce Merlin V-1650-9 Engine
Wing Span ..... 37' 0-5/16"
Length ..... 33' 4"
Pressure type exhausts
Planform of Propeller Blade
Inner wheelwell doors only during retraction and extension of gear.
Bomb rack
Sway braces
Retractable landing light
Rocket pylon
Green
Recognition lights:
Amber
Green
Red
Green
ANG-366
AIR NATIONAL GUARD F-51H-1-NA
ANG SERIAL NO. 44-64366N
CREW WEIGHT 200 LBS
K-14 Gunsight (dull black)
Link & cartridge case ejection chutes
Scoop fillet outline
Fuselage fuel tank filler cap (painted red)
Static ground connection (painted black)
Battery compartment
Signal pistol port
Fuel vent
Fuel strainer access
Long range drop tank
Shutter door
Air exit duct
Forged dural oleo-hydraulic shock strut
Strut and fittings painted with aluminum lacquer
Torque arm pivot
Step for entering airplane
Scissors link
Hydraulic brake line
Goodyear disc brake unit
24 x 7.7 high pressure tire
Jacking point
Main Gear Detail View
Green
Permanently mounted fin cap installed on all P-51H aircraft to improve directional stability
Radio compass DF loop
Twin homing receiver antenna installation
Black
Stainless steel panel
1/72nd scale
ANG 464366
White Position light
TEX ANG
Jacking point
Note: Tail gear door removed
Static wire
Forged steel strut
High pressure tire 12.5 x 4.5
Fuel Pressure
75 gal. Drop tank
Engine mount structure
Yellow spinner
ANG 464366 TEX ANG
Black lettering
Meters 1m 2m 3m
Scale in feet 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10


A
B
C
D
E
F
G
H
FRL
Fuselage Cross Sections
Aft running light
Trim tab operating mechanism access cover
Trim tab
Fin offset 2° to port (dorsal strake on ℄)
Wing section at fuselage center line
WRL
Parallel to fuselage reference plane
Typical wing section
NAA-NACA Low Drag Airfoil
Wing Section at Tip
Wing Sections
Canopy guide rail
Radio equipment
Red
Fuel filler cap (painted red)
Static ground
Machine gun access panels
Trim tab
Flat Pattern
Carburetor air filter induction cover
Flap degree indicator
Demountable wing tip
Green
ANG-366
Flush riveted aluminum alloy skin
Black
Walkway
After cooler access
Oil filler access
Ammo access plate
Remote compass access cover
Anti-glare paint (dark flat olive drab)
1/2°
Stabilizer Sections
offset 2°
Rudder Sections
One quarter only
Ethylene glycol coolant & water filler
AN/ARC command receiver transmitter antenna
Radio equipment (crackle gray finish)
Armor plate head rest
Flush riveted skin joint
lead-in
Dull black
Fuselage bolted joint (firewall)
464164
FRL
Fuselage reference line (FRL)
Downthrust 1° 45'
Access plates
Bolted joint
Aft Handling socket
Shutter closed
Dzus fasteners
Pitot
External canopy release
Bullet resistant windshield thermal type de-icing
Oxygen filler Access
Counterbalance
Tail warning radar antenna
Black
Black numbers
Access plate
Baggage door
Carburetor air filter induction cover
Fillet
Air exit duct Radiator shutter
Static ground line
Air scoop for combined oil and glycol coolant radiator
U.S. ARMY P-51H-30-NA
AIR FORCE SER. NO. 44-63960
CREW WEIGHT 200 LBS.
ENG. P. MORGAN
D. FRALEY
Tire deflection under load
North American Aviation, Inc.
P-51H Mustang