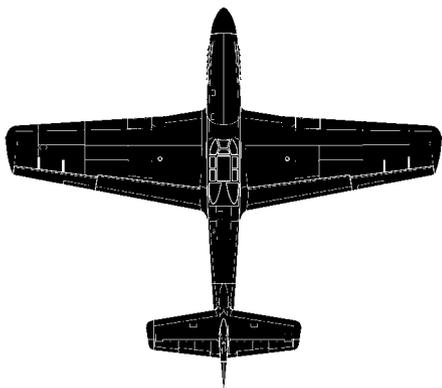


Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

P-51 Mustang



The North American P-51 Mustang was one of the most successful and significant of all the World War II fighters. In Europe, the Mustang downed more enemy aircraft than did any other type. It was sleek and beautiful, much beloved by those who flew it. It was also vital to Britain's Royal Air Force. In fact, it was the RAF which bestowed its classic name, "Mustang."

The Mustang lived two lives. It was developed in response to a 1940 RAF order. This first low-to-medium-altitude model was sufficiently impressive that USAAF bought 500 of a dive bomber variant called the A-36A. Then came orders for a variant called P-51A for photoreconnaissance and ground support. These "near Mustangs" turned in creditable service.

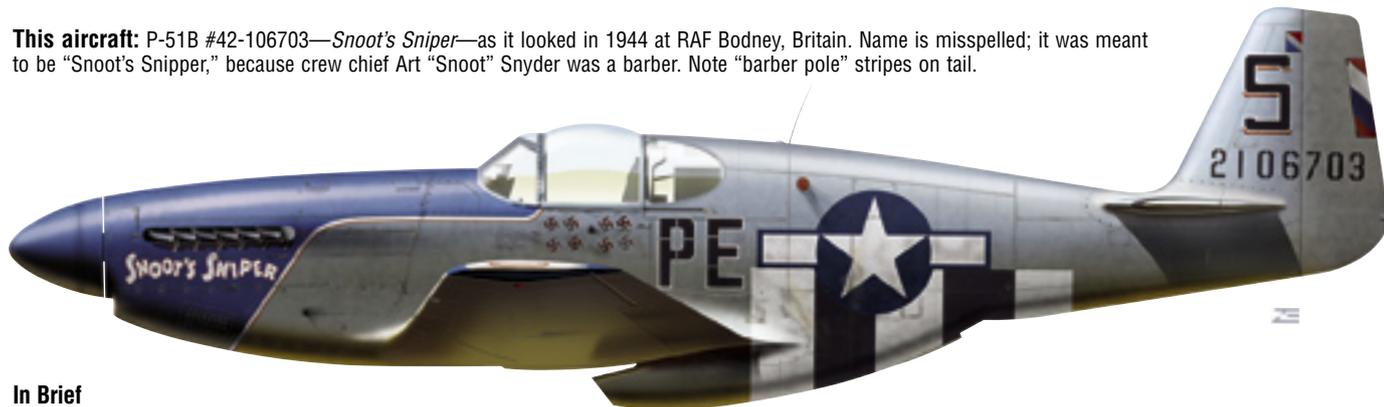
The Mustang's second, more famous life began with the P-51B. Designers dropped the Allison engine (optimized for low-to-medium altitudes)

and installed a more powerful, supercharged Rolls Royce Merlin power plant, giving the Mustang superb high-altitude performance. More fuel tanks gave it the range to fly deep into Germany. Now the premier US air-to-air fighter, the P-51B on Dec. 13 escorted high-altitude bombers all the way to Kiel and back—marking a milestone in fighter operations. These escorts sharply reduced losses of B-17s and B-24s. Similarly, P-51s in the Pacific escorted B-29 bombers attacking Japan from Iwo Jima.

One war later, the Mustang helped prevent a North Korean rout of US forces following Pyongyang's June 1950 attack on South Korea. Yet the P-51 will always be known primarily by its World War II record: 4,950 enemy aircraft destroyed in the air—about half of the US total—and some 4,000 more on the ground, plus 230 V-1 vengeance weapons.

—Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: P-51B #42-106703—*Snoot's Sniper*—as it looked in 1944 at RAF Bodney, Britain. Name is misspelled; it was meant to be "Snoot's Snipper," because crew chief Art "Snoot" Snyder was a barber. Note "barber pole" stripes on tail.



In Brief

Designed, built by North American Aviation ★ first flight Oct. 25, 1940 ★ crew of one ★ number built 15,621 (13,722 to USAAF) ★ **Specific to P-51D:** one Packard-built Rolls Royce Merlin 12-cylinder engine ★ armament, six .50-cal machine guns, two 1,000 lb bombs ★ max speed 437 mph ★ cruise speed 362 mph ★ max range 950 mi ★ weight (loaded) 11,600 lb ★ span 37 ft ★ length 32 ft 3 in ★ height 12 ft 2 in.

Famous Fliers

Three Medal of Honor recipients—Lt. Col. James Howard, Maj. William Shomo, Maj. Louis Seville ★ **274 "Mustang Aces"**—including Maj. George Preddy (23.83 Mustang kills), Lt. Col. John Meyer (21), Capt. John Voll (21), Maj. Glenn Eagleston (18.5), Maj. Kit Carson (18.5), Maj. John England (17.5), Capt. James Varnell Jr. (17), Capt. Ray Wetmore (17), Capt. Don Gentile (16.5), Capt. Clarence Anderson Jr. (16.25), Maj. Samuel Brown (15.5), Capt. Don Beerbower (15.5), Capt. Richard Peterson (15.5), Lt. Col. Jack Bradley (15), Maj. Robert Foy (15), 1st Lt. Bruce Carr (14) ★ **other notables**— Tuskegee Airman Col. Benjamin O. Davis Jr., Capt. Robin Olds, Capt. Chuck Yeager.

Interesting Facts

Flown by 17 "Ace-in-a-Day" pilots ★ developed in just 117 days ★ was NAA's first true fighter design ★ saw action in all WWII combat zones ★ some nicknames: Fifty One; 'Stang; Peter-Dash-Flash ★ last USAF model (1957) on display at National Museum of USAF, Ohio ★ seen in many films, including "Fighter Squadron" (1948), "Battle Hymn" (1956), "Empire of the Sun" (1987), "Tuskegee Airmen" (1995), "Saving Private Ryan" (1998).



Mustangs such as this P-51 saw action in all theaters.