

MUSTANGS AND LEGENDS

Fifty-five years ago the North American P-51 Mustang defended freedom. What's it defending now? Itself. Against extinction. Out of 15,686 built, 283 remain in one form or another. Only 149 still fly. ■ Thanks to hundreds of dedicated warbird owners, pilots, and the living legends who flew the famous fighter into our history books, the Mustang is winning once again. That was the impression on the ramp at Kissimmee, Florida, in April where more than 60 of the mighty 12-cylinder monsters amassed. ■ Lee Lauderback—owner of

**History flies
over Central
Florida**

BY ALTON K. MARSH
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FIZER



the Stallion 51 company which organized the event—called it the “Gathering of Mustangs and Legends.” Stallion 51 offers Mustang restoration, introductory flights, and training in a TF-51 (see “Crazy Horse,” August 1996 *Pilot*). With the legendary aircraft came a dozen P-51 pilots who either carried the fight to the enemy or the fire to the moon—from World War II aces to Apollo VIII astronauts Bill Anders and Frank Borman. Both former astronauts own and fly Mustangs.

How do you get to be a legendary fighter pilot? Word on the ramp was that in addition to stick-and-rudder skills, it takes the eyesight of a hawk and a world-class crew chief. The legends also paid tribute to the airplane designed and built in 117 days by Raymond Rice and Edgar Schmued at North American Aviation: The pilots who flew the Mustang in harm’s way still love it—this fighter with a Merlin engine so reliable you had to shoot it to stop it.

Yet, the Rolls-Royce Merlin engine, also built in this country under license by Packard Motor Company, was complicated. Mike Evans of the Rolls-Royce Heritage Trust recalled in his clipped British accent that the early Merlin models had at least 11,000 parts (counting nuts, bolts, and washers) but added it “could be higher.” World War II triple



Lee Archer (above) finds he still has fans more than 50 years after World War II ended. C.E. “Bud” Anderson (below) continues to fly P-51s and wrote what is considered the definitive pilot memoir, *To Fly and Fight: Memoirs of a Triple Ace*.



ace C.E. "Bud" Anderson says in his book, *To Fly and Fight: Memoirs of a Triple Ace*, that the parts number on the later engines is 14,000, based on the data he collected from World War II—so extensive it fills his garage.

The pilots flew the aircraft as if there were no tomorrow because there wasn't. They were in Europe to win, and if they could not win, then they'd die trying, because they felt that it was their duty. They still feel that way.

Despite the heat and a frenetic schedule at Kissimmee, 82-year-old triple ace Ken Dahlberg stood

Imagine yourself flying for your life while constantly twiddling all three trim wheels.

in the strength-sapping sun on the hard concrete ramp near *Old Crow*, a P-51 painted in the colors of Anderson's World War II fighter, and marveled at Rice and Schmued's work. "It is a match of form and function," the now-CitationJet pilot said.

On Dec. 19, 1944, Dahlberg—in a P-51 he named *Beantown Banshee*—led eight Mustangs in an attack against 90 enemy fighters, personally shooting down four. He got the Distinguished Service Cross for that one, according to "Experience Freedom," the official program for the Gathering of Mustangs and Legends. (There are a few copies still

available from Stallion 51.) After the war he formed a successful hearing aid company called Dahlberg Incorporated, manufacturer of Miracle-Ear systems.

Anderson is a close friend of P-51 double-ace Gen. Chuck Yeager, but was *never* his wingman (Hollywood movies, books, and even a historic plaque at Anderson's old base in England got it wrong). His book, out of print for nearly a decade, is scheduled to be republished in July by Pacifica Press. Historian of the U.S. Air Force Dick Hallion said of the book, "It is, I think, the finest pilot memoir of WW II. I have made it mandatory reading for all my historians." In this excerpt from *To Fly and Fight*, you get a sense of how the pilots felt about their Mustangs. The battle was on May 27, 1944, and the German plane chasing Anderson is carrying a ground-strafting cannon in its spinner big enough to explode the Mustang with a single shell:

"I am extremely busy up here, hanging by my propeller, going almost straight up, full emergency power, which a Mustang could do for only so long before losing speed, shuddering, stalling, and falling back down; and I am thinking that if the Mustang stalls before the Messerschmitt stalls, I have had it."

"I look back, and I can see that he's shuddering, on the verge of a stall. He hasn't been able to get his nose up enough, hasn't been able to bring that big gun to bear. Almost, but not quite. His nose begins dropping just as my airplane, too, begins

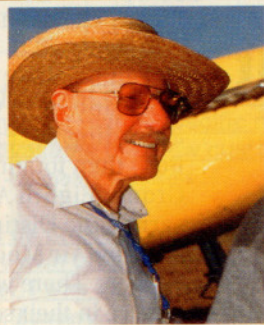
shuddering. He stalls a second or two before I stall, drops away before I do.

"Good old Mustang."

The Messerschmitt soon climbs again, but this time, it is Anderson in pursuit.

"I bring my nose up, he comes into my sights, and from less than 300 yards I trigger a long, merciless burst from my Brownings. Every fifth bullet or so is a tracer, leaving a thin trail of smoke, marking the path of the bullet stream. The tracers race upward and find him. The bullets chew at the wing root, the cockpit, the engine, making bright little flashes. I hose the Messerschmitt down the way you'd hose down a campfire, methodically, from one end to the other, not wanting to make a mistake here."

Now imagine yourself flying for your life while constantly twiddling all three trim wheels—rudder, aileron, and elevator. P-51 pilots *had* to, according to Anderson, who got two victories that



Legends Ken Dahlberg (top) and (above, left to right) Robin Olds flew Mustangs in World War II. Bob Hoover had 59 missions in Spitfires, then flew P-51 demos at airshows. Chuck Yeager escaped after he was shot down and imprisoned. Frank Borman has rebuilt two Mustangs.



These twins, Bill and Buck Patillo, had twin careers as fighter pilots and Air Force officers. They were cofounders of the Air Force Thunderbirds, and both became generals. They both have four children.



day. In all, he was decorated 25 times without ever taking a bullet from an enemy plane.

That wasn't true for most of the aces. Some of the legends honored in Kissimmee, such as Dahlberg, Yeager, the late Bruce Carr, R.A. "Bob" Hoover, and C.A. "Bill" Pattillo, were shot down. (Hoover was flying a Spitfire at the time.) Many of them were imprisoned, like Dahlberg and Hoover, or escaped without getting captured, like Yeager. Or they stole enemy airplanes and escaped in them, like Carr and Hoover. (Hoover's exploits are recounted in his book *Forever Flying*, published two years ago by Pocket Books.) Some of the pilots, like Robin Olds, had their aircraft heavily damaged by enemy fire several times.

Olds, who would later become the only pilot with aerial victories in both World War II and Vietnam, is the son of Army Air Corps Maj. Gen. Robert Olds, a World War I combat pilot and aide to Gen. Billy Mitchell.

He is considered a pioneer of today's modern Air Force for proposing ideas that led to modern precision bombing tactics. Complaints he made at the highest levels during the Vietnam era about the use of out-of-date and deteriorating bombs left over from World War II helped usher in the era of the smart bomb, although Olds insists his role was

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limited to complaining.

Olds' fighters were all named *Scat*, after a West Point roommate with eyes so poor that they kept him from his dream of becoming a fighter pilot. The friend served on the ground instead and was killed in the Battle of the Bulge. The restored *Scat VII* now flying just happens to be a P-51 Olds used in World War II. He had 13 victories—a double ace—in the air with many more enemy airplanes destroyed on the ground.

Speaking of double, twin brothers Bill and Buck Pattillo were double trouble

Lee Lauderback, former pilot for Arnold Palmer, is owner of Stallion 51 and organizer of the Gathering of Mustangs.



for any enemy throughout their careers. Both enlisted in the Army Air Corps in November 1942 and earned commissions and pilot wings in March 1944, according to "Experience Freedom." Both then fought in the 352nd Fighter Group, Eighth Air Force, where both earned the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with two oak leaf clusters. There was one important difference in their service records: Bill was shot down and captured by the Germans. After the war, both left the service and entered the Georgia School of Technology, but were recalled to the service in 1948 and assigned to the same base in Georgia before moving to the same base in Germany. Both were later assigned to Luke Air Force Base, Arizona, where they helped to organize the Air Force Thunderbirds demonstration team; Bill flew right wing on that first team and Buck flew left. Both later commanded fighter wings in Vietnam, and both became generals. (They have different wives.)

Lee Archer, an ace and one of the Tuskegee Airmen, will tell you on first meeting to please call him a "black" pilot. "There are kids in the cities that need to know it was a *black* pilot who did these things," Archer said. So here are the outstanding accomplishments of a black pilot: Archer had three victo-

ries in one engagement on October 12, 1944; during his service he won the Distinguished Flying Cross with an amazing 18 oak leaf clusters. Since retiring from the Air Force Archer has become a successful businessman, heading Archer Associates, a venture-capital holding firm, and serves on the boards of several major corporations.

His postwar success was not unusual among the legends in Kissimmee. For example, triple-ace Pete Peterson became an architect in civilian life and ended up conducting master planning for Air Force bases throughout Europe.

Also honored in Kissimmee was double-ace Robert Goebel, who earned a degree in physics after leaving the service and later returned to duty, where he contributed to various atomic energy and space programs. Goebel published his memoirs in a book titled *Mustang Ace: Memoirs of a P-51 Fighter Pilot*, published by Pacifica Press in 1991 and reprinted in 1998.

Almost unnoticed at Kissimmee, moving among the P-51s in a wheelchair, was a true P-51 legend of another kind, although his name did not appear on the program. He is David Lindsay, who restored and sold Mustangs from his Cavalier Company in Sarasota, Florida. Thanks to him, the P-51 lives on today not only in the United States but also in nations around the world that bought them for military use. In fact, it was Lindsay who sold the North American company a P-51 for use in airshow demonstrations by Bob Hoover.

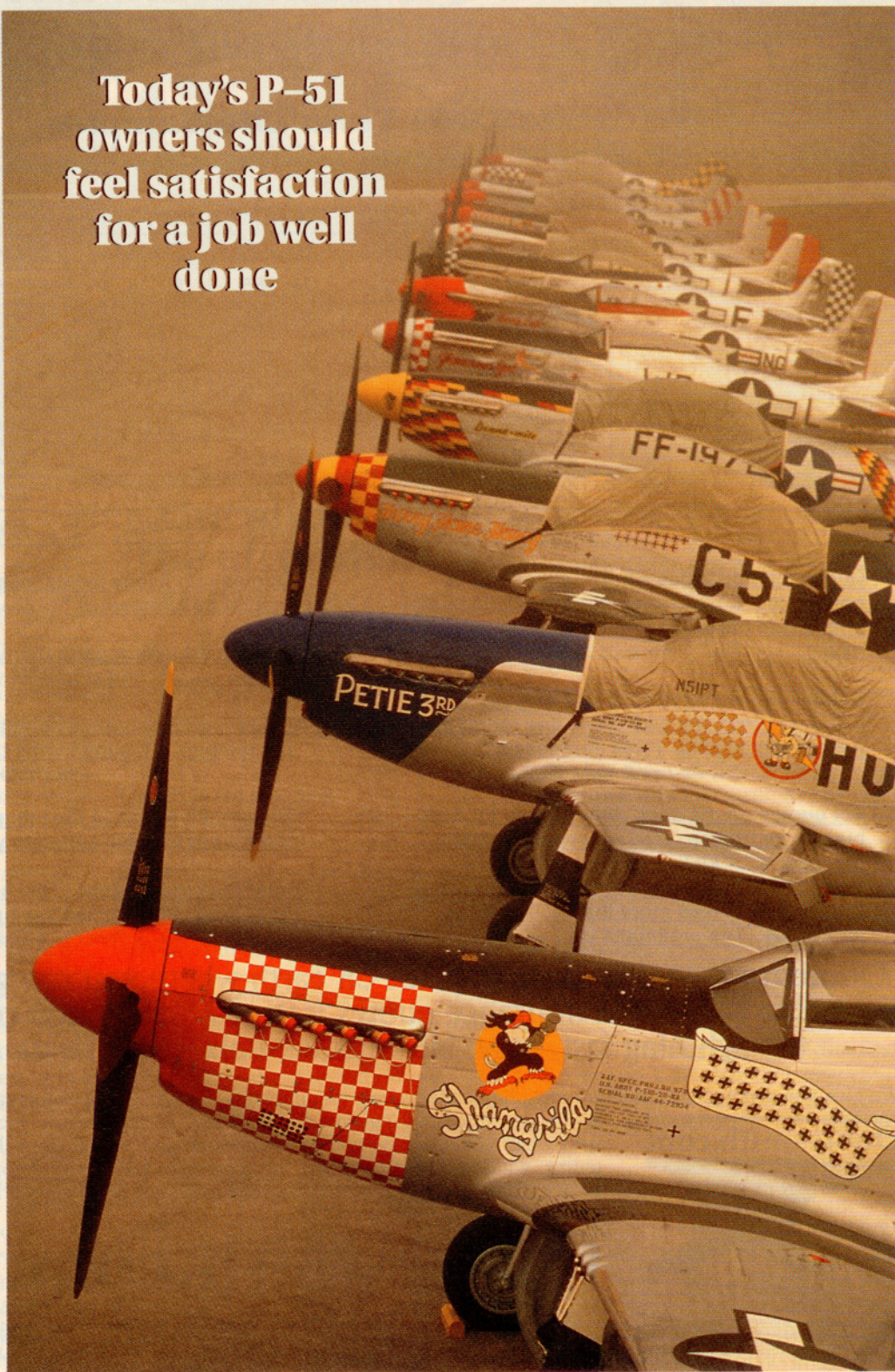
As his friends moved his wheelchair among the beautifully restored aircraft, he must have felt what Dahlberg did as he looked at a P-51 painted as *Glamorous Glen III*, after Yeager's aircraft; Dahlberg said he felt a sense of satisfaction. Today's owners of P-51s—who keep them restored, pay the bills, and selflessly share them

with the public—should feel that same satisfaction for a job well done. Maybe they should be called legends, too. □

To Fly and Fight is scheduled to be republished in July by Pacifica Press, 1149 Grand Teton Drive, Pacifica, California 94044; telephone 800/453-3152; or visit the Web site (www.pacificapress.com). The price is \$29.95. To see stills and

online video of the April "Gathering of Mustangs and Legends," see (www.mustang.ops). Telephone Stallion 51 at 407/846-4400. For further information on Mustangs, see (www.mustangs.mustangs.com). Links to additional information on Mustangs can be found on AOPA Online (www.aopa.org/pilot/links.shtml). E-mail the author at alton.marsh@aopa.org

Today's P-51 owners should feel satisfaction for a job well done



RIDING THE WILD THING

A backseater's report

Crew chief Roland Coles gives me the first hint of what a Mustang ride is like. "Push your headset earcups against your ears during takeoff. When the pilot reduces takeoff power, then you can take your hands down." It gets very loud when 1,490 wild horses stampede down the runway.

The airplane is *Su Su*, restored by Apollo VIII astronaut Col. Frank Borman and owned for the last several months by Bill Freeman of Nashville, Tennessee. John Baugh, past president of the Warbirds of America and mentor to Freeman, is my pilot.

Just sitting on the ground, the airplane looks like it wants to fight, especially in the cockpit. There's a button on top of the stick marked *B* to release bombs, and a trigger on the front of the grip to fire all six guns. Handles marked Bomb Salvo Left and Bomb Salvo Right on the lower left side of the

cockpit are used to mechanically drop fuel tanks or bombs. The fuel selector has positions for combat drop tanks, and the airspeed indicator goes all the way to 700 miles per hour.

This will be only a reconnaissance mission. But just in case, the standard 27-foot belts of ammunition—the whole nine yards—have been loaded into each wing and fed into the wing's three guns.



There are no controls in the back: I'm human baggage in a spot above the aircraft's radiator where a fuel tank and 150 pounds of armor plating once resided. I don't mind. I'll take the bullets for John.

Ignition switch Off, mixture Off, pull the propeller through, check throttle open one inch, oil and coolant radiator air control switches Open, prop clear, starter switch On, and count six blades.

Continue to hold the starter switch and move ignition to Both, fuel boost On, primer switch On. When engine fires, move mixture to Normal and release primer switch.—Flight Handbook

The big Packard-built Rolls-Royce Merlin grumbles and pops. The noise creates Mustang envy among lesser mortals on the Sun 'n Fun EAA Fly-In ramp 10 feet below. I pity them. A little. We taxi to the runway.

Caution: Do not exceed 40 in. Hg during ground runup with-

out having tail tied down, because of the possibility of airplane nosing over.—Flight Handbook

Our runup completed, we taxi into position as flag volunteers signal for takeoff, but we wait. There are 11 specks in the sky ahead, and *Su Su* can overtake any aircraft that departed in the last five minutes. My hands are on the earcups, pressing them into my head. Baugh reaches to the upper right of the cockpit and cranks the canopy closed. Now, everyone outside is the enemy.

It is recommended that 61 in. Hg and 3,000 rpm be used for all takeoffs. Do not jam throttle forward, as torque will cause loss of control of airplane.—Flight Handbook

Su Su roars like the start of a Nascar race, accelerating powerfully. It lifts off at 100 mph and speed quickly builds to 170. Baugh throttles back at altitude and we loiter at 220 mph, beginning our recon. He's spotted what could be an enemy airfield, thinly disguised as a cow pasture southeast of Lakeland, Florida. We go down for a look, speed building to 260. I'm feeling light G forces while still in the descent as Baugh smoothly anticipates our level-off. (The P-51 can handle eight positive and four negative Gs.)

It's an airstrip, all right, covered with fake weeds. The evening air is calm, but the Mustang bounces at this speed over the few remaining thermals of the day. Pilots say that at 400 mph IAS there's a whole lot of shaking going on in the P-51. The airplane is capable of 425 mph at maximum cruise power settings, and the airspeed redline is 505 mph.

Pulling up quickly (the radiator I'm sitting on is vulnerable to small-arms fire), we float through an aileron roll. Then a four-point roll. Then an eight-point roll.

Ahead lies a phosphate mine that just may hide an entire enemy camp. Before descending we again scan for birds—not wanting to slice and dice them with our 13-foot-diameter propeller. There are none. Not only is there an enemy camp, but sitting near it is a supply train disguised as a phosphate carrier. A second target has been located.

Back at altitude—another victory roll. Baugh's years of experience owning and flying a P-51 are showing. Since selling his Mustang, he has often flown *Paul I*, the P-51 flown by EAA founder Paul Poberezny. We try to climb, but there are enemy everywhere. We've got to get back *alive* to report our targets. One is an enemy trainer. No problem: If he sees

us, he'll lose control from fright. But he doesn't.

Pre-traffic-pattern check.

Fuel on fullest tank, fuel boost On, carb ram- and hot-air as needed, mixture Normal, prop 2,700 rpm, oil and coolant switches Automatic, clean out engine at 3,000 rpm and 61 in. Hg for one minute.—Flight Handbook

The tower assigns us a slam-dunk approach. Baugh sets the flaps at 15 degrees, increasing to 47 degrees on short final, and bleeding off speed to 120 mph at the edge of the field. Wait a minute—if there are so many enemy near Lakeland, how do we know the airport is still in friendly hands? Maybe we should hit that *B* button on the stick, destroy the runway, and...

Baugh lands, touching down at 90 mph, and taxis clear.

Set throttle at 1,000 rpm, open canopy, oil and coolant radiator air control switches at Open, raise flaps, reset trim, prop at full Increase, fuel boost Off.—Flight Handbook

As it turns out, the debriefer just wants to share a soda, so we don't tell him about the targets. After all, he could be a clever enemy soldier *disguised* as a debriefer.

—AKM