

PAYING TRIBUTE

A GATHERING OF MUSTANGS AND LEGENDS

JIM BUSHA | *Photos by Brady Lane*

IF YOU ASK A GROUP OF AVIATION ENTHUSIASTS what their favorite World War II fighter is, many would say the P-51 Mustang. With its sleek lines, its laminar flow wing, and the distinctive sound of its Rolls-Royce Merlin engine, it's no wonder many fighter pilots called it the "Cadillac of the skies."

For those who gathered in Columbus, Ohio, this past September to pay tribute to an airplane they helped create, build, and fly, the airplane has a special meaning. For some, the Mustang is a symbol of fond memories and unforgettable flights; for others, it's the airplane that brought them home safely time and time again.

To honor the men and women who helped design, build, fly, or fight in the P-51 Mustang, Stallion 51 Corporation organized an event called The Final Roundup: The Gathering of Mustangs and Legends, following up on a successful event held in Kissimmee, Florida, in 1999. The first event gathered an impressive 67

Mustangs and 12 legends, the largest gathering of P-51s in one place since the Korean conflict. With more fighter pilot legends heading west every day, Stallion 51 decided to gather everyone one last time at Rickenbacker International Airport in Columbus, Ohio. With its rich history as an Army Air Force base during World War II and a Tuskegee Airmen base after the war, Rickenbacker was a natural setting for the more than 50 legends and 75 P-51s in attendance. To spend time at this event and meet the people who built, maintained, and flew these airplanes—and the people who keep the airplanes alive today—was an honor for me. >





ABOVE: *Ina the Macon Belle and Cripes A' Mighty 3rd both owned by Kermit Weeks.*



Lee Lauderback, EAA 333795, is president of Stallion 51 and owner of two P-51 Mustangs: *Crazy Horse* and *Crazy Horse II*. Lee's curiosity and devotion toward the Mustang started when he was just 10 years old, as he watched Bob Hoover in his famous lemon-yellow P-51 at an air show. That memory still burns bright in Lee's mind 47 years later. Driven by a never-ending desire to fly and own a Mustang, Lee chose a career in aviation. He began flying gliders in competition, became a fire spotter flying a Cessna 150, and eventually became chief pilot for golf legend Arnold Palmer. Hard work, many corporate flying hours, and a chance meeting with a fellow Mustang addict set the stage for Lee's future.

"I met a fellow aviation visionary named Doug Schultz," Lee said. "Doug had just purchased a dual-controlled TF-51 Mustang in 1987 that he called *Rascal III*. By 1990, I left the corporate world and became partners with Doug, and we renamed the Mustang *Crazy Horse*. This was also the day that Stallion 51 was born. Since that time, I have accumulated around 7,000 hours flying the P-51. Most of that time is with students, fellow owners of Mustangs, or other warbird pilots and people who want to experience the lore and feeling of flying the



Cloud Dancer, (Top-L) owned by Jimmy Leeward. **FF-704** (Top-R) owned by Lewis Shaw. **Lee Lauderback** (R) president of Stallion 51 and owner of two P-51s, **Crazy Horse** and **Crazy Horse II**.

Jim Busha



“THIS EVENT IS NOT ONLY A SHOW OF GRATITUDE TO THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO FOUGHT FOR THIS COUNTRY, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY, IT IS A TRIBUTE TO THE COUNTRY AS A WHOLE, ONE THAT STOOD SHOULDER TO SHOULDER TO DEFEAT EVIL.”
— TONY BUECHLER

greatest fighter of World War II. Every time I fly the P-51, I learn something new about it. Flying the Mustang has also been a humbling experience for me, especially when I sit and talk to a veteran who flew one in combat. In a generic sense, I do this for fun, but those people did it to defend our country. No one is shooting at me, so it makes my day a whole lot easier.

“Here at the Gathering, we have all the great planes and pilots in one location,” said Lee. “Guys like Bob Hoover, the Tuskegee Airmen, Bud Anderson, the WASP, and many other top contributors who made this airplane so famous. Arnold Palmer gave me some wonderful advice years ago when he said, ‘Part of what you do in life is giving back to what you love.’ That one simple saying was the torch that led the way for me to do something really special for the Mustang and the legends who flew it.”

LEGENDS

Retired Col. C.E. (Bud) Anderson, USAF, EAA 563333, reminds me of my grandfather. He has an infectious smile with a soft-spoken voice. He is a gentleman in every respect: patient, kind, and courteous as he answers questions he has heard



Retired Col. C.E. (Bud) Anderson

Jim Busha

hundreds of times before. But under that elderly persona is an adventure-some boy who became a fighter pilot at age 21 and one year later was a triple ace with 16-1/4 victories, all while flying the P-51 in combat. Bud flew the P-51 *Old Crow* for the 357th Fighter Group during World War II.

“To me this event is truly remarkable,” Bud said. “Obviously, I have seen a lot of Mustangs gathered together before, both in the air and on the ground. Back then most of them were all painted the same color, though, and had a lot more wear and tear to them. I wasn’t prepared for how colorful it was at Rickenbacker; it was a beautiful mixture of paint

schemes representing almost all of the fighter groups from World War II. This event is a great nostalgic surge for me, seeing some of my old squadron mates and the beautiful Mustangs that have been restored. I had just turned 23 when I flew my last P-51 combat mission. Looking back now, never once did I ever think that the P-51 would still be soldiering on 60-plus years later. The persona of this fighter still being held in such high esteem by so many people today was the last thing on my mind. The only thought I had back then was getting through today's mission in one piece, so I could see tomorrow.

"In 1990, almost 35 years to the date since I had last held the reigns of a Mustang, I was invited to fly one that had been painted in my *Old Crow* markings. My hands found all the levers, dials, and switches just where they had been so many years ago. Since that time I have continued to fly various Mustangs throughout the years. I am very humbled by all the attention. Most of us veterans feel that we were just doing our job, and are eternally grateful for the outward appreciation we receive from the public. There are a lot of guys who didn't make it back while flying the Mustang, and I feel this event is to honor them as well.

"My most memorable times in the P-51 have to be when I was mixing it up in the sky over Germany as we were involved in swirling dog-fights against the Luftwaffe. Nothing else compares when someone else is shooting at you! I love the P-51 because it is not only a beautiful airplane, but also it got me through the war safe and sound."

Retired Gen. Donald Strait, USAF, EAA 420103, flew the P-51 Mustang *Jersey Jerk* in the 356th Fighter Group. By the time World War II ended, Don had racked up an impressive tally of 13 and 1/3 aerial victories in the skies over Europe. Some of these victories were achieved flying the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt, while the majority were gained at the



Retired Gen. Donald Strait

controls of the P-51 Mustang. None of these were easy, and all required the skills learned early on during flight training. Some skills, however, were learned on the job and required total concentration, seat of the pants flying skill, and a little luck.

"The P-51 was a joy to fly in combat, but I learned an unbelievable lesson the very first time I flew one in combat," said Don. "I was at 20,000 feet and had just shot down a German fighter as I racked the Mustang over on its side to clear my 6 o'clock. All of a sudden, the Mustang snapped on me, and I wasn't able to recover until I had passed through 13,000 feet. The problem was the Mustang had a fuselage tank right behind the pilot that carried 85 gallons of fuel; the Thunderbolt didn't have that, and I wasn't used to the extra weight back there. But all in all the Mustang was a godsend; we now had the range and the added capability to mix it up with the Luftwaffe under our terms instead of theirs.

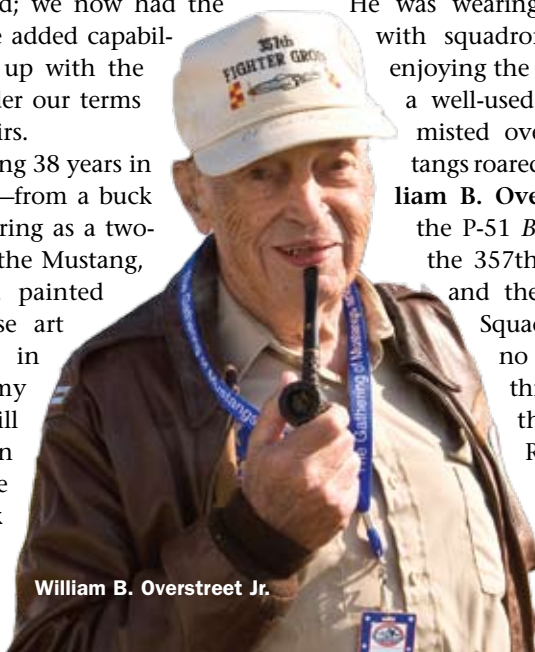
"After serving 38 years in the Air Force—from a buck private to retiring as a two-star general—the Mustang, which I had painted with the nose art of *Jersey Jerk* in honor of my home state, will always remain my favorite airplane. Back in 1944 and



1945, I never thought this airplane would continue to attract so much interest and attention as it does today. This gathering means so much to me; it is a time to reminisce with long-lost friends and comrades who I had flown Mustangs with so many years ago."

While everyone else gathered against the fence, viewing a pair of P-51s flying low and fast overhead, one older gentleman stood alone, back from the crowd.

He was wearing an A2 jacket with squadron patches and enjoying the final puffs from a well-used pipe; his eyes misted over as the Mustangs roared overhead. **William B. Overstreet Jr.** flew the P-51 *Berlin Express* for the 357th Fighter Group and the 363rd Fighter Squadron. "There is no better sound in this entire world than that of a Rolls-Royce Merlin," said Bill. "I just wish some of the guys I



William B. Overstreet Jr.



Todd Therp, EAA 262024, strolls down a line of P-51s at dawn.

had flown with could be here today to enjoy these sights and sounds. To me this event is for all of those who didn't make it back; they are the heroes in my book.

"Our group was the first group in England to fly the Mustangs in combat; we were known as the Yoxford Boys. The Mustang to me was very impressive, and my checkout consisted of climbing in, firing it up, and taking off. No books to read or lengthy checkouts; there was a war on, and we had to fly our first mission the very next day. I was tickled to death flying the Mustang; it felt like putting on a favorite overcoat. Most of our missions were bomber escorts to Berlin and surrounding areas, so I named my P-51C *Berlin Express*. I thought the C model was far better than the D, especially with a Spitfire/Malcolm hood canopy. Although the C model only carried four guns instead of the six in the D model, I never found it necessary to use more than four; it was tough for an opponent to survive that kind of firepower.

"I had a lot of very interesting and scary combat missions while flying the Mustang, and always felt that I was flying as a copilot to an angel.

There were many times I shouldn't have made it back alive, but the Mustang never let me down and got me through the war in one piece."

Retired Lt. Col. Clyde B. East, USAF, had 13 victories in the P-51 *Lil Margaret*. Although he is 86 years old, given the opportunity he would love to crank up a Mustang and take it around the patch. But for the moment, Clyde seems content to sign autographs and speak of his experiences flying with the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) during World War II.

"In June of 1941 when I joined the RCAF, I had never been near a control stick," said Clyde. "It took me a while to get into a cockpit because at the time there were more pilots than airplanes, but that all changed when I arrived in England in the spring of 1943. I was assigned to 414 Squadron and given the choice to fly one of three different airplanes—the Supermarine Spitfire, the Hawker Hurricane, or the North American Mustang. Naturally, being from the United States, I chose the Mustang.

"The British version of the early

P-51A Mustang was called the Mk I, and I thought it was the most capable fighter the English had at the time. Unfortunately, this early model had the Allison engine and lacked high-altitude capabilities. That would all change, however, with the introduction of the Rolls-Royce Merlin engine. All my missions with the Canadians were flown as tactical reconnaissance, taking photos of potential targets and harassing the enemy any way we could. In February 1944 I was reassigned to the USAAF and placed in the same role as a tac recon pilot. This time, however, the performance and capabilities of the Mustang increased significantly.

"Although I was part of the 9th Air Force, my primary job was to gather aerial intelligence for Gen. Pat-



Retired Lt. Col. Clyde B. East

ton's ever-advancing 3rd Army. Even though we were told time and time again to avoid enemy contact in the air if at all possible, it was hard not to mix it up with the Luftwaffe. I guess you could say I was a frustrated fighter pilot trapped in a recon (reconnaissance) pilot's body. I got my first victory on D-day June 6, 1944, and my 13th and final victory in April of 1945. Most of my missions were flown in a Mustang I named *Lil Margaret* after my wife back home. I am very humbled by all the attention, and yet I am delighted by all the interest shown to us old fighter pilots by so many young

Noble Peterson (second from left) poses with event attendees in front of a cleaner version of “his” P-51.



people. We were all just doing our job for our country.”

Although the nose art and the colors of the Mustang Noble Peterson is standing in front of resemble the airplane he used to fly, *Dakota Kid*, there are some subtle differences. One is that this P-51 is much cleaner. But more noticeable is that the once young fighter pilot, who flew bomber escort missions at 25,000 feet in sub-zero temperatures for more than seven hours at a time, outwardly appears to have aged gracefully. Called “Cowboy” by his squadron mates because he came from North Dakota, Noble—who flew with the 255th Fighter Group and 358th Fighter Squadron—openly shares his P-51 Mustang experiences with all who will listen.

“I was not your typical fighter pilot. I was an ‘old man’ of 27 years when I joined the squadron in March of 1944. By then everybody wanted to fly the Mustang, and I got my chance by standing in the right place at the right time. We had to stand in a line and count off by two, four, six, and eight. Some of the men went to P-40s, some to P-38s and P-47s, and I was lucky enough to get P-51s. I started flying the C model of the Mustang, which I thought was a wonderful fighter. During my second tour, I flew the D model. By then I had more than 300 hours in Mustangs, and I felt that all I had to do was think a maneuver and the Mustang would react to it. It

was a responsive airplane and could out fly anything the Germans had—pre-jet.

“Most of my missions were bomber escorts deep into Germany. After we had shepherded the bombers out of harm’s way, we were free to drop down and strafe German airfields. Unfortunately, the Mustang was not as well-suited for that mission because of all the coolant lines running along the fuselage. Many P-51 pilots spent the rest of the war as POWs after making one too many passes over an enemy airfield. But that was war, and we had to take chances. All in all though, I have to say that the Mustang was certainly one great horse to ride into combat on.”

MUSTANGS

Christopher (Kit) Goldsbury, EAA 760638, is the owner of the P-51 *Miss Marilyn*. Kit has deep appreciation for the P-51 Mustang. His father was a B-24 Liberator pilot during World War II, and he remembers his dad speaking fondly of the Mustang as it shepherded the big bombers on their missions.

“I grew up hearing all these great things about the P-51,” said Kit, “and when I was at AirVenture a few years ago, I saw a line of beautiful Mustangs, standing wingtip to wingtip. There was one Mustang, however, that stood out from the pack; it was painted in the 55th Fighter Group scheme of *Miss Marilyn*. I could not

stop drooling over that airplane and thought it was the most beautiful thing, besides my wife, that I had ever seen. Even though I was not a pilot, I wanted to own one so I could preserve it to ensure that future generations would never forget about what these veterans fought and flew in.

“I came back to Oshkosh the following year and saw that *Miss Marilyn* was for sale. Needless to say, I bought it; one of those crazy, spur of the moment decisions! My main intent for spending well over \$1 million on an airplane that cost \$54,000 in 1944 was to preserve it in its pristine condition as a tribute to the men and women who designed it, built it, and flew it during the war. I consider myself more an enthusiast and preservationist. Being the caretaker of this Mustang gives me a pride of ownership, knowing that these were built by the wonderful hands of craftsmen and women who collectively poured their hearts and souls into crafting the world’s greatest fighter. This is a treasure I want to share with as many people as possible, lest they forget about the men who flew and fought in these airplanes to preserve our freedoms.”

Tony Buechler, EAA 114482, owns the P-51 *Petie 2nd*. While attending medical school, Tony lived with a doctor in rural Marengo, Iowa, as part of his advanced training. After one particularly strenuous day, the

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Jack Roush, EAA 478254



doctor, Burns Byram, looked at him and said, "Come on kid, we're going to the airport."

"I thought that was cool because I had never been at an airport before," Tony said. "I foolishly asked him why, and he looked at me somewhat strangely and said, 'To fly my airplane, of course.'"



Jim Busha

Tony Buechler and his wife Kris.

It was a day of firsts for Tony as the doctor pulled an olive-green P-51 out of the hangar. "I sat in the back on an egg crate and wore a tiny helmet as we blasted off and flew down Main Street, terrorizing Marengo. I was only 20 years old, and to tell you how impressive I was, I thought that everyone who flew had a Mustang in their hangar." About a year later he scraped up the money to learn how to fly and was shocked he wouldn't learn in an aircraft with four propeller blades and a 12-cylinder engine.

"I quickly found out I had a huge monetary and aviation ladder to climb before I ever owned a Mustang, but I knew someday I would have one," Tony said. "That day finally came in 1985, when I bought a blue-nosed Mustang called *Petie 2nd*, a 15th Air Force combat veteran."

Tony considers himself the custodian of the airplane, saying no one can really own a piece of history, "You just take care of it until you pass it on to the next guy.

"I still feel the same excitement when I strap myself into the cockpit

Under the umbrella of Roush Industries, NASCAR race team owner Jack Roush has recently begun manufacturing new engine parts for Mustang V-1650 Rolls-Royce Merlins. These include new camshafts, valves, bearings, bowstrings, and lifters. The new parts ensure that Mustangs will be flying for a long time to come, but Jack's life is not just about racing cars or designing more efficient engine parts and upgrades. He is driven by a desire to honor the men and women who flew and fought during World War II.

"I bought my first P-51 Mustang in 1992, and I wasn't even a pilot yet," said Jack. "I bought it from a fellow named Bob Burns who had a stable full of them. Mine was called *Rascal* and was painted in a pseudo yellow military paint scheme. Eventually that airplane was repainted in the *Old Crow* markings as a tribute to my good friend, Bud Anderson. After I acquired my pilot's license, we did an extensive avionics upgrade including Stormscope, SkyWatch, GPS, oxygen, and a DME. I do a lot of cross-country flying to racing venues and typically fly the Mustang at between 21,000 and 24,000 feet. Needless to say, the oxygen was a must have.

"What intrigues me about the Mustang is, it is a very romantic airplane in terms of the things that have happened to it. It is relatively simple systems-wise and has an engine that has a lot in common with the engines in our race cars. The Merlin was very advanced for its time, especially with the four-valves-per-cylinder overhead cam engine. I was intrigued by that and probably equally as interested in the internal combustion engines in all of their forms. Since I bought my first Mustang, I have amassed an additional 40 Rolls-Royce Merlin

engines. Right now, we could equip an additional 40 Mustangs to keep them in the skies.

"I sold *Old Crow* a while back and have in its place a P-51 called *Gentleman Jim*. This was an old Reno racer that I found in a barn, and the people who owned it were past interest in repairing it and making it airworthy. We did a full restoration on it with all new rivets, skins, and spars. I have also been re-creating and restoring a C model Mustang for the last eight years and hope to have it flying relatively soon. This early version of the Mustang has a Spitfire canopy that was called the Malcolm hood, and the aircraft will be painted in the *Old Crow* scheme to replicate one of Bud's earlier Mustangs.

"Flying the Mustang makes me feel like I am a part of history. What our country went through as it globalized for war production was one of the most dramatic times for the American economy. It was a time of explosion in technology and capacity for all the manufacturing areas around the country. The rate at which knowledge, capacity, and capability for all things manufactured was beyond the imagination of most people at that time. But the people of this country met the challenges head-on and did an outstanding job mobilizing a country and its arsenal of defense. I feel that the Mustang was by far one of the top byproducts of that.

"I am 65 years old now, and most of the people involved in the conflict who survived are between 85 and 90 years old now. My window is closing as well, and I am trying very hard and as fast as I can to have the Mustangs and their engines in better-than-new condition so that when I have passed my productive life, I will be able to pass these on to someone else who can in their time become the new custodian of history."

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THE FIRST MUSTANG

This XP-51 is the last of the four prototypes built by North American Aircraft in 1940, and the first P-51 delivered to the US Army Air Forces. It was acquired by EAA after years in storage at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, was completely restored from 1975 to '76 and flew until its retirement in late 1982. It now welcomes visitors to the Eagle Hangar in the EAA AirVenture Museum in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. EAA Founder Paul H. Poberezny is one of a few pilots who have flown every model of the P-51, including this one.



and to the men and women who flew them. It was a bittersweet gathering, however. The passion of the aircraft owners makes it clear that these aircraft will soldier on for future generations to revere, but the veterans who flew them are leaving us at a rapid pace. For many of these men, flying the P-51 Mustang was one of the greatest accomplishments in their life. Although they are well into their golden years, the sights, sounds, and memories of the flying the Mustang is what they will never forget. I hope we, as a country, don't either. *EAA*

and hit the starter switch as the big, black-colored blades tick by and the Merlin coughs to life. Because this is a combat veteran, I sit and wonder what it must have been like for a kid, 20 to 21 years old, 60-plus years ago, sitting in this very same seat, sweating bullets wondering if he was going to make it back okay. Words cannot describe how emotional it is to me, knowing that a young man was willing to give up his hopes, dreams, and himself for our country. I am honored to look out

onto the very same wing, through the very same canopy out across the very same hood. I feel the same way as I see all these Mustangs lined up wingtip to wingtip. This event is not only a show of gratitude to the men and women who fought for this country, but more importantly, it is a tribute to the country as a whole, one that stood shoulder to shoulder to defeat evil."

An estimated 150,000 people made the pilgrimage to Columbus to pay their respects to the P-51 Mustang

Jim Busha is a police detective and has served in law enforcement for 23 years. He is also an avid pilot and owns a 1943 Aeronca L-3.

GO DIRECT



The Gathering of Mustangs and Legends official website:
<http://www.gml2007.com/index.asp>

To view more EAA photos of the event, visit www.EAA.org/Photos

To view more aircraft in EAA's collection, visit: www.AirVentureMuseum.org

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LYCOMING IO-390-X SPECIFICATIONS (gross)	
Horsepower	210 hp
Height	17.25 inches
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Length	30.70 inches
Dry Weight	308 lbs
Oil	Sump cap, 8 quarts



LANCAIR PERFORMANCE	THRO-390	IO-390
Cruise (typ at 8,000 ft)	225 mph	211 mph
Cruise (typ at 24,000 ft)	294 mph	n/a
Fuel Consumption (typ)	12.5 gph	11.5 gph
Range (w/ reserves)	1450 sm	1450 sm
Endurance (with reserves)	6 hrs	6 hrs
Rate of Climb @ sea level		
Solo	1700 fpm	1700 fpm
Gross	1200 fpm	1200 fpm
Take Off Roll @ sea level	1500 ft	1500 ft
Landing Roll	900 ft	900 ft
Stall Speed 1/2G	65 mph	65 mph
Wing Loading	23 lbs/sq ft	23 lbs/sq ft
Power Loading	10.5 lbs/hp	10.5 lbs/hp
∅ loading (anti G)	+4.4, -2.2	+4.4, -2.2



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