

The CRTC was activated at Nadzab on 15 June 1944, and it quickly developed specialised training programs. Whilst its main aim at conception was to provide an introduction to SWPA operations, from 26 January 1945 it fell under the command of Colonel John "Jock" Henebry, a practical combat commander who expanded the syllabus into hands-on combat and flight training. Topics included weather reconnaissance, gunnery, instrument flying, bombing, type transition and communications. Intelligence topics included jungle survival and tropical medicine. The fighter syllabus at Nadzab as it pertained to the Mustang included formation flying, dive bombing and strafing techniques, and proven tactics against Japanese fighters.

Totals of 136 and 164 Mustangs were converted into F-6D and F-6K reconnaissance models respectively. Both variants carried oblique cameras mounted in the rear fuselage, complemented by a vertical camera installed just behind the radiator. The 82nd TRS received the first F-6D in late November 1944 at Morotai, ferried up from Nadzab, although two were lost to weather on the first delivery run. Meanwhile, a shortage of the new type saw the 110th TRS keep operating its P-40Ns from Leyte and Mindoro, not receiving the first F-6D until February 1945.

Then shortly afterwards a new fighter squadron, the 460th FS, was equipped solely with P-51Ds and attached to the 348th FG. This parent group had built its fame on the Thunderbolt when it entered New Guinea in mid-1943, and its other three squadrons were still parading Republic's big fighter. The addition of this extra squadron made the group exceptional, boasting four fighter squadrons instead of the USAAF standard of three. The group's other squadrons, the 340th, 341st and 342nd FS, commended transition to the Mustang in January 1945.

The 35th FG received its first P-51Ds in early March 1945, and by the end of that month all three of its squadrons had also checked out in the new North American fighter. During the first quarter of 1945, the Fifth Air Force was already turning to ground-support. The appearance of the sleek in-line engine P-51 took the Japanese by surprise, with several cases where Ki-61 Tony pilots mistook Mustangs as their own, usually with adverse consequences. Following Japan's surrender, the Mustang moved to Japanese bases, where it became the mainstay Fifth Air Force fighter; even the 8th and 49th FG were operating it by the late 1940s. Select samples of these post-war markings are included in this volume to demonstrate the evolutionary nature of the resultant markings from wartime schemes.

Technical

The P-51D became the most widely produced and deployed variant of the Mustang, and the most ubiquitous in the Fifth Air Force inventory. However the Dallas-built P-51K also made an appearance in the theatre, equipped with a hollow Aeroproducts propeller which replaced the original Hamilton Standard one. However the Aeroproducts design produced dangerous tip flutter at high RPM manifold pressure, and was replaced by the Hamilton Standard in the field where possible.

When the Mustang began its career as the Allison-equipped A-36 dive-bomber, it became clear that fitting a turbocharged powerplant would transform the airframe into a capable fighter. The Merlin was the obvious choice, however since its production was slated for Spitfires, Rolls-Royce