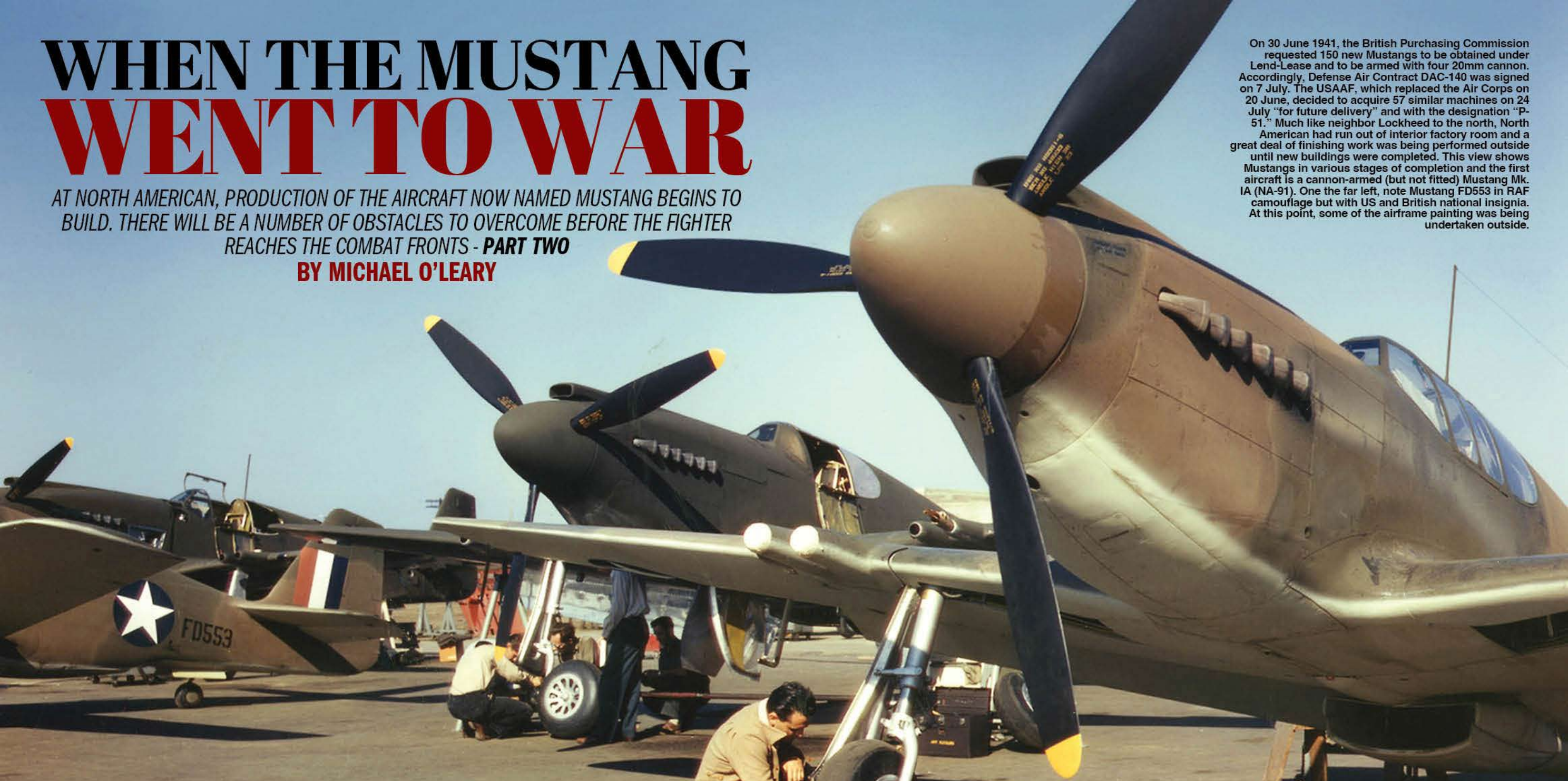


# WHEN THE MUSTANG WENT TO WAR

AT NORTH AMERICAN, PRODUCTION OF THE AIRCRAFT NOW NAMED MUSTANG BEGINS TO BUILD. THERE WILL BE A NUMBER OF OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME BEFORE THE FIGHTER REACHES THE COMBAT FRONTS - **PART TWO**

BY MICHAEL O'LEARY

On 30 June 1941, the British Purchasing Commission requested 150 new Mustangs to be obtained under Lend-Lease and to be armed with four 20mm cannon. Accordingly, Defense Air Contract DAC-140 was signed on 7 July. The USAAF, which replaced the Air Corps on 20 June, decided to acquire 57 similar machines on 24 July "for future delivery" and with the designation "P-51." Much like neighbor Lockheed to the north, North American had run out of interior factory room and a great deal of finishing work was being performed outside until new buildings were completed. This view shows Mustangs in various stages of completion and the first aircraft is a cannon-armed (but not fitted) Mustang Mk. IA (NA-91). One the far left, note Mustang FD553 in RAF camouflage but with US and British national insignia. At this point, some of the airframe painting was being undertaken outside.



The surge in aircraft orders during 1940 caught many American factories unprepared. They all needed expansion; both in manpower and in physical assets. North American was certainly no exception but with the acreage available at Mines Field there was room for new buildings, hangars, and ramp facilities. The company, along with all other southern California aircraft builders, put ads in newspapers seeking employees. These ads were not just in local papers but in papers that stretched across the country. America was still reeling from the Great

Depression and suddenly, and almost by magic, here were ads promising full employment at good wages and in the sunny and warm paradise of southern California. Some aircraft builders had decided to relocate from the east coast and its harsh climate with limited flying days to southern California, and NAA was one of them.

North American was originally created as a "holding" concern during 1926. The company bought and sold interests in numerous airlines and aviation manufacturing facilities but the Air Mail Act of 1934 put an end to

such organizations that could create possible monopolies. Accordingly, North American became a manufacturing company in Dundalk, Maryland, with James "Dutch" Kindelberger at the helm and there probably could not have been a better choice as leader. Dutch decided that a move away from Maryland and its limited flying days to a location at the rather barren Mines Field in Los Angeles would make economic sense since aircraft could be flight tested and delivered to customers on an almost

year-round basis. He also reasoned that it would be smart to concentrate on the O-47 observation aircraft along with the NA-16 trainer design (see related article in this issue), since this meant NAA would not have to start out by competing with more established firms on bomber and fighter projects. Fortunately, his thinking would change and NAA would soon begin design work on what would become the Mitchell bomber and the Mustang fighter.

The dusty expanse of Mines Field, which was just starting to become the main airport for Los Angeles and taking that honor away from Glendale's Grand Central Air Terminal, was soon a frenzy of building activity and North American hiring agents were taken aback by the number of applications pouring in through the mail and by hand-delivery. America had been battered, no question about it, but Americans wanted to work and the aviation companies, along with the hundreds of subsidiary operations, were giving them that chance. Los Angeles was soon overflowing with

workers who were all competing for a limited amount of living space and this started yet another boom — building houses and apartments to contain the thousands of new arrivals.

While all this was going on, the government was also busy. During December 1939, Congress passed the "Neutrality Act." It must be remembered at this time, that the nation was pretty much split on the "European War" with half of America, the "Isolationists," wanting to stay out of it, while the other half supported more direct involvement and this