

THE MURDER OF CAPTAIN COGGESHALL

Lieutenant Chester Coggeshall with his 343rd Fighter Squadron P-38J-10-LO 42-67764. Note the variety of missions painted on the fuselage pod.

IN THE WANING DAYS OF THE WAR AGAINST GERMANY, CITIZENS BEGAN KILLING AMERICAN PILOTS AND AIRCREW

BY MICHAEL O'LEARY

COLOR PROFILES COURTESY OSPREY PUBLICATIONS

The date was 16 April 1945 and the Second World War in Europe would be over in just a matter of days. Yet, the fighting and killing was relentless on both sides — from the Allied forces attacking German positions to those desperately attempting to defend them. At this point, the USAAF had complete control of the air and thousands of fighters and bombers roamed over European air space with almost free will in search of targets. Even though the fighters of the *Luftwaffe* had been pretty much neutralized, that service's extremely effective anti-aircraft crews were braced for just about any form of aerial assault.

With their green and yellow checkered noses, the Mustangs of the 343rd Fighter Squadron, 55th Fighter Group, were extremely distinctive but when a flight of the unit's P-51Ds came roaring in at tree-top height, the gunners defending the airfield east of Sillersdorf, Germany, did not take time to admire the colorful markings. They immediately swung into action with their 20mm and 40mm defensive weapons stationed around the field's perimeter as the Mustangs raked the area with fire from .50-caliber Browning M2 machine guns.

Captain Chester Elmer Coggeshall Jr. was flying as Red Leader in his



Insignia for the 343rd Fighter Squadron.

