

WHEN THE MUSTANG WENT TO WAR

FINALLY JOINING OPERATIONAL SQUADRONS, THE MUSTANG MEETS A STRONG AND DETERMINED ENEMY - PART FOUR

BY MICHAEL O'LEARY

As typical of any new fighter, one of the first things the Royal Air Force did was to test the Mustang Mk. I against other types of similar aircraft in RAF service. One of the most important was the comparison between the Mk. I and Supermarine Spitfire Mk. VB. The Mustang was rated as an excellent medium altitude fighter; pleasant to fly, stable, and generally comparing extremely well with the Spitfire. Up to 15,000 feet, the Mk. I retained a slight advantage in maximum speed, this rising to 35 mph at its rated altitude of 15,000 feet. Rate of climb proved poor, and was easily exceeded by the Spitfire, which could also out-turn the Mustang, even when the latter made use of its flaps. In a dive, however, the cleanliness of the American fighter allowed it to accelerate rapidly away, easily outdistancing the British aircraft. The Mustang's operational ceiling was listed at about 25,000 feet.

Brief trials against a Hawker Typhoon were also carried out between 10,000 and 15,000 feet — the altitudes at which both planes excelled. Here, the Mustang proved to be inferior in both level speed and climb, though more maneuverable. When going into a dive, the Mk. I's clean design again allowed it to pull initially away, but the great weight and

power of the Typhoon soon told and it quickly overtook the Mustang.

Perhaps more telling were tests subsequently carried out between a cannon-armed Mk. IA and a captured Focke-Wulf Fw 190A (this was one of the great coups of the early war since it allowed British full access to a completely operational variant of the Luftwaffe's top fighter). Up to 23,000 feet there was little to choose between the two aircraft so far as maximum speed was concerned, except that between 10,000 and 15,000 feet the Mustang was appreciably faster (up to 15 mph). When diving, there was again little advantage to either aircraft, though if the dive was prolonged the Mustang slightly gained.

The real advantages of the German fighter were demonstrated in climb and acceleration; the Fw 190A climbed higher much more quickly, at a steeper angle, and at a greater speed



In a move criticized by the American government, Mustang Mk. I AG348 was one of ten Mustangs supplied to the Soviets. During the war, the Roosevelt administration undertook every precaution to make sure the Soviets would not get Mustangs.

(at least 10 mph) than the Mustang. The acceleration proved better under all conditions but particularly so when both aircraft were flying at lower

airspeeds. In maneuverability, the Fw 190 proved generally superior,



Mustang Mk. I AM106 at Boscombe Down testing an underwing stores pod. Note that all armament has been removed.



An interesting view of a Mustang Mk. I in its original role of Army Co-operation.