

COLORS OF WAR

FURTHER SELECTION OF COMBAT AIRCRAFT COLOR IMAGES BY MICHAEL O'LEARY



An obviously pleased Lt. Foster with his Mustang. Even though P-51s were built to exacting mass-production standards, there was a great deal of hand-fitting with panels. Therefore, a crew chief tried to make sure all the panels stayed with his particular aircraft and the "last four" of the serial can be seen stenciled on each piece of cowl. Mustang anti-glare panels came from the factory in either flat black or anti-glare green. What is interesting about the 368th's aircraft is that it appears the nose color was used for most of the anti-glare panel although it is a bit difficult to tell. It appears that on 44-11222 the dark green was sprayed back to merge into the flat black. Other interesting details include the red trim around the gun ports and the thin yellow outline to the fuselage codes. Note how worn the P-51 black recognition stripes have become.

Based at East Wretham, the Mustangs of the 359th Fighter Group wore a variety of colorful paint schemes but one of the most dramatic was P-51D-5-NT 44-11222 flown by Lt. William B. Foster of the 368th FS. Wearing the code CV1, the name *Jolie Helene* was on the left side. We are lucky to have these Kodachromes (although we do not know the photographer) to show the plane in detail. Even though the crew chiefs tried to keep their fighters as presentable as possible, we must remember these planes were rarely in hangars and spent all their operational life outside in the harsh British weather. Hence, the best that could be done was a thorough wipe-down to get rid of exhaust, oil, and grime. The Mustang carries the unit's standard dark green nose painted in a very flat paint but then the entire fighter is enlivened by liberal applications of yellow. Just aft of the fuselage antenna is the small white recognition light that was carried only on the P-51D-5 series aircraft. The APS-13 set was installed in the field and can be seen on the middle of the vertical fin. The finish on combat Mustangs was completely different than today's pristine restorations. Note the overspray on the yellow paint applied to the rudder and the fact the detail markings were applied mainly with a brush.



Three-quarter front view of 44-11222 reveals an interesting detail. At this point in the war, the 359th added the individual Mustang's codes to the underneath of the left wing and "CV1" was painted in large block stenciling, and this served as a quick identification feature in the heat of combat. East Wretham was not an ideal airfield and the grass runways quickly became muddy with seasonal rain. When the USAAF took over the field, a great deal of pierced steel planking was added and this helped but the harsh conditions of the field were reflected in the appearance of the 359th's Mustangs. Like thousands of other P-51 pilots, Lt. Foster served out his tour, which expired in July 1945.

