

COLORS OF WAR

INTERESTING AMERICAN COMBAT AIRCRAFT OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR FROM THE CHALLENGE ARCHIVES BY MICHAEL O'LEARY

With its massive fuselage, the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt became an "aluminum canvas" for squadron artists. We must remember that before the war, sign painting was a popular profession. Unlike today when computers can spew out any sort of signage, many young men established themselves in towns across America as sign painters. With the war, they joined the military and those in the USAAF were often consigned to paint insignia, markings, figures, etc. on bombers and fighters — payment

usually in the form of a bottle of whiskey. Heroic ace Francis "Gabby" Gabreski and his ground crew pose with his Thunderbolt that, oddly, did not feature any sort of elaborate nose art but rather had an extremely neatly done panel of his aerial victories, applied under the canopy. Aircraft of Gabreski's 56th Fighter Group received a variety of camouflage schemes — covering up the bright natural metal, which was a handicap when the Thunderbolts were down low on ground attack missions. Each P-47 was different but many followed the standard RAF camouflage patterns. Gabby was different since his P-47 had a very random application of colors (note that the D-Day invasion stripe markings can still be seen under the wings — the undersurfaces were left in natural metal) and the paint used on the unit's planes was usually drawn from RAF stocks. Gabreski asked his squadron painter to finish his aircraft "Luftwaffe-style" with a series of blotches in Ocean Gray over Dark Green.

A proud Brazilian crew chief wipes off the national insignia on his 1st Fighter Aviation Group Thunderbolt. After numerous attacks on their shipping by U-Boats, Brazil entered the war against the Axis on 22 August 1942. President Getulio Vargas made the grandiose statement that he would send 100,000 combat troops but, in the end, the number was about 25,000. The 1st Fighter Aviation Group was not formed until December 1943 and pilots were shipped to Orlando, Florida, for USAAF standard training on P-40s. They then moved to Aguadulce, Panama, for 110 hours of further training before heading back to the States for P-47 indoctrination.

Master Sergeant Robson Saldanha with his P-47D of the Brazilian 1st Fighter Aviation Group in northern Italy during 1944. The elaborate nose insignia has a slang expression that means "Fight With a Spur." The 1st FAG headed to Italy in October 1944 and began attacking German forces in conjunction with the USAAF and RAF. As can be seen, the fighters were given a coat of Olive Drab to blunt the visibility of their bright natural metal finish.