

COLORS OF WAR

RARE IMAGES FROM OUR FILES
DEPICTING A VARIETY OF WWII
AMERICAN AND ALLIED AIRCRAFT
BY MICHAEL O'LEARY



Crew of a 498th Bomb Squadron "Air Apaches" B-25D Mitchell with their attractively painted but well-weathered aircraft. As can be seen, the plane's glass nose has been painted over and four .50-caliber machine guns have been added along with the early style cheek guns that held two .50-caliber weapons each. Note the aluminum flak-damage patch on the forward nose.

The P-39Q was the last (and most produced) variant of the Airacobra. The main difference was that the four wing-mounted .30-caliber weapons were replaced with a single .50-caliber weapon in a fairing under each wing panel, reducing weight, increasing range, and making for a better handling fighter. Several variants of the P-39Q were fitted with cameras, including five Q-1s modified to Q-2-BE with K-24/K-25 cameras mounted in the fuselage behind the wing. Then, some 147 Q-5s were modified to Q-6-BE with a similar camera fit. Eight P-39Q-10-BEs were modified to Q-11s, again with K-24/K-25 cameras. Unfortunately, we can't tell which photo-recon variant this Airacobra is, but the color photo does show the two types of cameras utilized. The heavy exhaust staining indicates that the Allison V-1710 had been operating at a high-power setting.



This interesting public relations photograph taken to illustrate a "hands across the water" moment as USAAF officers shake hands with their French counterparts during the hand-over of a group of Curtiss P-40F Warhawks painted in Free French Air Force markings and carrying the famed Lafayette Escadrille insignia on the sides of the fuselage. In reality, the French were a problematic group. With the surrender of the country, the French began turning in their Jewish citizens at a rate that shocked even the Nazis. The southern part of the nation was run by a French government that was really a puppet for the Germans while neither Churchill or Roosevelt trusted Charles de Gaulle and his attempt to create a Free French government in Britain. However, after the defeat of the French in North Africa the Allies decided it would be wise to supply them with aircraft and other weapons of war. France was one of the first customers for the P-40, placing an order for 100 Hawk 81A-1s (increased to 230) in a desperate race to re-arm against the Germans. However, the country surrendered before any of these planes could be delivered. With the invasion of North Africa in late 1942, the *Groupe de Chasse II/5*, a Free French unit, was equipped with P-40Fs — the Merlin powered variant of the Warhawk. They were later replaced with P-47Ds but the Warhawk remained in French service into the late 1940s.

Republic P-47D 42-75855 of the 5th Emergency Rescue Squadron photographed at Mount Farm, England, while parked on pierced steel planking. Aircraft of the 5th ERS carried a variety of markings but the red/white/blue cowls were relatively standard along with the yellow identification stripe on the flying surfaces. Most of the unit's Thunderbolts (usually supplied from the 56th Fighter Group) were classified as "War Weary" and carried a "WW" on the vertical tail. When a bomber mission to Europe was undertaken, two 5th ERS Thunderbolts would launch from Boxted and track the bombers as they crossed the Channel. A dinghy was carried on each underwing pylon and a flare dispenser was added behind the centerline drop tank. Armament varied — from a full load of eight .50-caliber machine guns to none. This aircraft has had four of the weapons removed. If a bomber went down, a Thunderbolt would fly overhead and drop the dinghies and then return home while the other remained as a rescue launch was called in.

