



KODACHROMES OF EX-MILITARY AIRCRAFT  
PRIOR TO TODAY'S MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR RESTORATIONS



Power coming back and everything down, two Mustangs approach Mojave Airport for landing during 1968. Lead aircraft is N511D, which is P-51D-30-NA 44-74950. This aircraft was part of the historic 1957 auction at McClellan AFB and the buyer was E.D. Welner who was one of the pioneers of the Warbird Movement. E.D. did not hold onto the plane, now registered N5464V, long before he sold it to another pioneer — Michael "Mustang Mike" Coutches of Hayward, California. Coutches was in the business of flipping P-51s and he soon did that, starting a chain of owners and in 1962 it was bought by Mel Paisley who changed the registration to N511D. Next stop was the Mustang Pilots Club of Van Nuys. Members of this organization purchased shares in the aircraft and one of the early members was Clay Lacy who was soon appointed safety officer. "One of the founders was perhaps one of the worst pilots I have flown with," Clay recently recalled. "After failing his checkout, I told him he had to have 50 hours of T-6 time and I flew a lot of those 50 hours. He failed the next test so it was 50 more hours. Same thing on. The third saw another 50. By that time, I felt he was competent to get the plane off and on the ground but not much else. I had a great time flying N511D but left the club when I purchased my own Mustang."



N511D shortly after it arrived at Van Nuys in 1963 and parked in front of the Schaffer Air Ambulance hangar where that company kept a mint Beech 18 used on medical flights. The hangar would also house Dave Zeuschel's P-51D N332 and this was at a time when around eight Mustangs flew out of Van Nuys. The yellow and white paint scheme is typical of the time and is rather attractive. The end for the aircraft would come on 25 August 1971. Michael O'Leary recalled, "I was standing on the ramp at Van Nuys watching the Mustang. The pilot had cranked up the Merlin and was preparing to head out to the active. There was a young fellow standing nearby and the pilot rolled back the canopy and motioned for him to get in the back. He did and the plane took off. It never came back." Out over Palmdale, California, the pilot had entered into a series of aerobatic maneuvers and tore a wing off the P-51 with fatal results. On 14 December 1971, the FAA deregistered the aircraft.



"Let's paint the Mustang in Halloween colors!" Actually, N5412V doesn't look bad in orange and black. P-51D-25-NA 44-73586 was another Mustang that sold at the McClellan AFB auction — bringing the taxpayers some \$711 on a sealed bid. It was soon acquired by Michael Coutches and then went through eleven owners up until 1973 when it was purchased by John Trainor on 26 October (my favorite owner was the Anti-Communist American and Latin Foundation of Miami who owned it for two months in 1959. Wonder what they were going to do with it?). Trainor had the P-51 for less than a year — on 13 October 1974 he was killed in the crash of the aircraft at Coatesville, Pennsylvania. Note F8F-2 N5005 in the upper right.