

**FRIDAY NIGHT OLDIES**  
BY DOUG FISHER

**RARE KODACHROMES OF SURPLUS MILITARY AIRCRAFT BEFORE THE ADVENT OF MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR RESTORATIONS**



From the attractiveness of our main image, we switch to this view of P-51D N74978 on the Aero Sport ramp at Chino, California. Built as P-51D-30-NA, the previous civil registration of N6169U can be seen on the fuselage. This plane, which is in completely stock condition including cockpit armor plate, has a curious history. It was being operated by the 182nd Fighter Squadron of the Texas Air National Guard when an emergency in Costa Rica had it and three other TX ANG Mustangs flown to Costa Rica by ANG pilots to counter a possible overthrow of the government. It became aircraft #4 of the "Costa Rican Air Force" (the country did not have one) and it served its purpose but the four planes were left in the country. In 1964, this aircraft was acquired by Will Martin and flown back to the USA where it was purchased by P-51 "junk man" Richard Vartanian. Even though it looked in bad condition, the plane was kept flyable and was used in an episode of the TV series *Cannon* along with a proposed film about the "Red Tails." It was eventually acquired by Arthur "Wally" McDonnell and kept at Shafter, California, where it was destroyed in a hangar fire along with a Sea Fury and two Lockheed rigid rotor helicopters. The paperwork went to Cal Pacific Airmotive and an all-new TF-51D was built around the identity. Making a first flight on 15 October 2020, the new TF-51D carries the N74978 registration.



During the early 1970s, it was not uncommon to find up to a dozen Mustangs parked on the Aero Sport ramp. Built as P-51D-20-NA 44-63865, it appears this aircraft may have seen service with the 354th Fighter Group before being sold to the Royal Swedish Air Force where it served as 26018. Following service with that country, in 1955 it went to Nicaragua as GN90 and then was purchased in 1963 by Will Martin with the US civil registration N6163U (at this point in time, confusion begins when the USAAF serial is listed as 44-63885). In 1969, it was purchased by Jack Kistler and Jack is seen doing some maintenance on the Mustang after a local flight. In 1998, restoration began at Square One Aviation to convert the plane to a TF-51D with the registration N151TF. This was completed and the aircraft remains active today with the name *Tempus Fugit*.

During the 1960s and 1970s, a prospective buyer could still find North American and Commonwealth-built Mustangs scattered around Australia. One such example was Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation CA-18 Mustang Mk. 22 A68-198. The plane saw limited service with the Royal Australian Air Force and beginning in 1958 it was passed through several owners but nothing ever happened with the aircraft. In 1967, it was



disassembled, packed in a wooden crate, and shipped to California where it was purchased by Joe Banducci and Elmer Ross of Bakersfield. It was initially registered as a "P-51C" with the N# N65198. This was apparently a paperwork slip since the intent was to have the RAAF number used as the N# - N68198. Realizing that Australian-built Mustangs were not included in the "Limited" certification, the partners began shuffling paperwork and, in a process too long for this short caption, applied the paperwork for N4674V/USAAF 45-11483 (a story in itself). Completely tricked, the FAA issued a Limited rather than Experimental certification. Given the name *Cluchetton*, the Mustang began racing at Reno and in 1976 carried the false registration of N607D (a Beech Baron). In 1977, it became N86JB followed by N286JB in 1982. In 1983, it was purchased by Don Whittington and used as a chase aircraft for Piper's new PA-48 Enforcer project. The aircraft went through a couple more owners before being exported to France in 1991 where it became F-AZIE. In 1993, it was badly damaged by an in-flight fire and forced landing. Rebuilt, it was sold back into the USA by Mark Clark's Courtesy Aircraft and is currently operational.



Paint schemes on civilian Mustangs were all across the board — from pretty terrible to not so bad. P-51D N6341T falls into the last category with its bright red and white overall scheme accented with gold and black trim, making for a handsome classic aircraft. This particular P-51 (USAAF 44-74474, RCAF 9270) went through a number of schemes in a

short amount of time with perhaps the most unattractive being a "sort of" military paint job with the name *Rasca!* when it was owned by Bob Byrne. In 1994, it was acquired by Jack Roush and refinished in the markings of Bud Anderson's *Old Crow*. In 2006, the Mustang was acquired by Jim Hagerdorn and reregistered as N451MG.