



Tac-R P-51A-11-NA 43-6164 of the 107th TRS at Middle Wallop. On 11 July 1944, while on a low-level reconnaissance mission, the airplane disappeared some eight miles west of St. Lo, France. Pilot Capt. Broderick successfully evaded the enemy and made it back to Allied lines.

**D**uring World War II, the USAAF's need for a fast tactical reconnaissance (Tac-R) airplane that could carry cameras as well as guns was satisfied by the photo-reconnaissance version of North American Aviation's P-51 fighter. The first USAAF P-51s modified with cameras for the Tac-R mission were Allison-engine P-51-NAs (NA-91) armed with four 20mm cannons. These were retained from the British order for 150 NA-91 Mustang IA/P-51s. The second Mustang variant modified were 35 P-51As in 1943.

In 1942, the USAAF retained 58 P-51s from the British order of 150 Mustang IA/P-51 aircraft, delivering 92 to Great Britain. Two airplanes were diverted to NAA for the Packard-built Rolls-Royce Merlin engine conversion and one airplane went to the US Navy for land-based deck carrier landing and performance trials. Of the remaining 55 airplanes, two were modified with cameras and associated operating controls for the tactical reconnaissance mission. These aircraft were 41-37320 modified by USAAF Materiel Command's Fairfield Air Depot in Akron, Ohio, and 41-37327 by the NAA Experimental Department in Inglewood, California. The modified airplanes were very similar but there was a noticeable design difference of the left aft radio window through which the oblique camera, mounted behind the pilot's armored seat, would take photos. This window in 41-37320 had a noticeable bulged hood that mounted over the camera lens while 41-37327 had an optically flat glass insert through which the photos could be taken.

On 29 August 1942, the modified P-51 41-37320 (now designated P-51-2-NA) arrived at the Minneapolis Modification Center of Mid-Continent Airlines where it became the pattern for the modification of an additional 45 P-51s. Mid-Continent had established a reputation for getting this type of specialized work done quickly and efficiently. The B-25B Mitchells utilized by Jimmy Doolittle for his famous raid on Japan were flown to Mid-Continent. Doolittle and Mid-Continent's Benny Krouse planned and supervised the installation of a rubber fuel tank that

# TAC-R MUSTANGS

AN EXAMINATION OF THE FIRST MUSTANGS MODIFIED FOR THE TACTICAL RECONNAISSANCE ROLE AND HOW A DOZEN WERE LOST CROSSING THE ATLANTIC

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