

FRIDAY NIGHT OLDIES



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SURPLUS MILITARY AIRCRAFT WERE SUBJECTED TO NUMEROUS MODIFICATIONS AND COLOR SCHEMES PRIOR TO BECOMING VALUED — AND EXPENSIVE — COLLECTOR ITEMS. IN THIS SEGMENT, WE PRESENT A VARIETY OF UNSUAL AND INTERESTING AIRCRAFT

This magnificent sunset photo of P-51D-25-NT 44-11439/N5071K is via Jim Larsen. The Mustang was photographed over Puget Sound, Washington, with owner Norton Smith at the controls. Oddly, this aircraft has been subject to much internet misinformation — including five different dates on which it crashed. Days after this photo was taken, the Mustang crashed into Puget Sound on 5 November 1961. The Mustang was engaging in some tail chasing with Ben Hall, who was flying P-51D N5482V (from which this photo was taken). Hall said they had taken off from Paine Field, Everett, Washington, and were flying between 4000 and 6500 feet. Hall stated that the other Mustang disappeared and when he looked for it, he spotted wreckage in the water. Smith, 28, was a flight engineer with United and he was taking William Behr, 25, who worked at Boeing on the flight. The USCG searched the area but did not find the Mustang although one body was recovered. Newspaper reports at the time of the tragic crash made mention of Behr's height of 6-ft 3-in, which kept him from a military flying career. His brother Ted, at 6-ft 6-in, had similar problems while sister Nell, at 5-ft 8.5-in, had to get a special waiver so she could become a stewardess with Pan Am. Father Lt. Col. Howard Behr was a long-time military and civilian pilot while his wife was a barnstormer during the 1930s.

P-51D USAAF 44-72767/N6836C parked at Palwaukee Airport near Chicago, Illinois, during 1963. The next time we saw the Mustang (complete with Confederate flag and painting of a bull's head on the fuselage!) it was on its back with various parts scattered in the grass after the owner lost control on landing. The plane was repaired but then damaged again in a gear-up landing at Auburn-DeKalb Airport, Indiana, on 2 September 1967. It was then acquired by Cavalier Aircraft and we presume it was broken down into components for Cavalier's civilian and military P-51 rebuilds. As a note, the airfield started out in 1926 as Gauthier's Flying Field and shortly after was renamed Swallow Airplane Field (apparently because an OX-5-powered Swallow biplane was based there). In 1928, it became Pal-waukee Airport (Intersection of Palatine Road and Milwaukee Avenue). During the late 1940s through the 1970s, it was home to many interesting ex-military surplus aircraft. Today, it is called the Chicago Executive Airport. As the name implies, if you are interested in looking at airplanes then you are simply not welcome. It has become a business jet field servicing Chicago.



Just what we would like to find in the weeds at our local airport — Salvadorian Air Force P-51D FAS 407 sits minus engine, prop, and other components. It is quite easy to see how bits from other Mustangs have been used on this airframe by matching the camouflage scheme on the cowling, etc. It is believed that this aircraft started life as P-51D-25-NA USAAF 44-73973. It went to Canada as RCAF 9281 before being sold surplus as N6325T. It was then illegally smuggled to Salvador to take part in the "Soccer War" between that nation and Honduras. FAS 407 was purchased by Jack Flaherty who obtained the majority of FAS P-51s in 1975. The aircraft was registered as N37FF and then became N51JC with well-known Canadian Warbird pilot Jerry Janes who acquired the aircraft as a "package." The fighter was restored and took up the identity C-GJCJ and then N51JC *Cottonmouth* but we have to state up front that it is very unclear what of the original serial number remained with the restoration. David Price eventually bought the Mustang as N151DP and it is still active. As with many of these Latin American Mustangs, actual identities are problematic.

Just another tired "old" Mustang left parked outside by the airport fence. This was the next step in the history of P-51D-30-NT USAAF 45-11391 that is illustrated on the following pages as N6170C. After it was sold by Jeff Cannon, it became N5151N in 1969 and was then semi-abandoned as can be seen. Fortunately, the plane would survive and is airworthy today as N51MV.

