

# CONNIE'S BY MICHAEL O'LEARY PHOTOGRAPHY BY SIMON BROWN LAST WARRIOR

THE FINAL  
"TIME CAPSULE"  
MUSTANG IN  
CONNIE  
EDWARDS'  
COLLECTION IS  
UP FOR SALE

Almost looking like something out of the *Twilight Zone*, the camouflaged Mustang sits on Connie Edwards' Texas airfield.

The nations comprising Europe at the turn of the last century viewed Latin America as a ripe "picking ground" for minerals, oil, agriculture, and jewels. Accordingly, nations such as Britain and Germany tried to make strong military and commercial inroads into many of these countries.

Soon after the First World War, France set its sights on Guatemala and dispatched a French Aviation Mission to the country. At the time, the Guatemalan Army actually operated a few aircraft — namely Avro 504s but these were soon bolstered by a small contingent of French

designs. However, in 1924 a bloodless revolution took place in which the Army sided with the revolutionaries. Because, no native Guatemalans knew how to fly, the French refused to take part.

By 1926, military aviation consisted of a *single* Nieuport fighter and a Morane-Saulnier MS.35 two-seat trainer. By 1929, the *Cuerpo de Aeronautica Militar* became an official branch of the Army and a military aviation school was established at La Aurora airfield near Guatemala City with various French training aircraft.

With only a few tired aircraft, a modernization program was initiated during 1937 and America began to make some inroads when Ryan sold STM-2 trainers while Waco supplied a number of biplanes. However, the really big *coup* came when Guatemala obtained Boeing P-26 Peashooters. Shortly before WWII started for America, these thoroughly obsolete machines were turned over by the Air Corps to the countries from which they were operating. Thus, the aircraft at Clark Field went to the Philippine Air Force while the P-26s guarding the Panama Canal went to Guatemala. Eventually, fighter pilots from that country would graduate directly from the P-26 to the P-51.



Over the years, the FAG Mustangs have worn a number of schemes. This is how N38227 appeared when it was flying in a polished metal scheme as FAG-315. Note the underwing rockets and homemade napalm bombs.

Guatemala qualified for the Lend-Lease Act so, in return for facilities to build military bases, the air force got a variety of training aircraft and C-47s. Even though there were a bit over 20 airfields, the *Cuerpo de Aeronautica Militar* comprised just 70 officers and men, including about 30 pilots.

As readers of this magazine realize, many Latin American nations illegally obtained Mustangs for their air forces but Guatemala was the first Central American

country to legally acquire P-51s and they did this through the Reimbursable Aid Program (RAP).

The country was beset with revolutions and by 1951, the nation was having to rely on support from the communist party. A delegation from Guatemala traveled to Glendale, California, to meet with aviation supersalesman Charlie Babb who offered them three Mustangs that he had at the field. This seemed to be a relatively good deal

but the US State Department stepped in and nixed the export permits, stating the planes were needed by the USAF for the Korean War.

Next stop was Washington, DC, where a request was made to obtain a dozen P-51D straight from the government. Guatemala stated they would have used Lend-Lease funding they still had, pay with grant aid, or, as a last resort, pay with cash. Once again they were turned down with the simple reason the fighters were urgently needed in South Korea.

At this point, the very shadowy Inter-Continental Airways out of New York came forth with an offer to supply 15 Mustangs (complete with pilots and ground crews if needed). As word got around that Guatemala wanted fighters, an even more shadowy company came to light — Commerce International Company of New York. This outfit, headed by an Oswald Rehquate, stated they could supply 22 Mustangs that would not only be fully armed but also have overhauled Merlin engines for an individual price of \$4400 per aircraft. Even back in those distant days, that