

OUT OF ACTION

LITTLE DID THIS OHIO AIR NATIONAL GUARD F-51H PILOT KNOW THAT HE WOULD BECOME AN AIRSHOW'S MAIN ATTRACTION

BY ROY STANTON



The wrecked F-51H quickly became a tourist attraction. Captain Bleimes continued, "I was trying to deal with the problems and avoid the crowd of over 100,000 people, I wound up setting it down in a field off the end of a runway. The left wing and propeller tore off, and the fuselage broke on both sides of the cockpit." Obviously time had changed his memory a bit since the fuselage was buckled not broken, and the left wing was still attached to the aircraft.



With replacement jets in the not too distant future, the F-51H was deemed non-repairable and scrapped.

On 19 July 1953, the Ohio Air National Guard decided to launch four F-51H Mustangs to participate at the Akron-Canton Regional Airport's airshow. The event was marking the 50th anniversary of the Wright Brothers' flight and a number of vintage aircraft were taking part including a Curtiss Pusher, a WWI SPAD, and a Pitcairn Mailwing. Major airlines had airliners on display and open to the public

while the military services brought in numerous aircraft. The pilot of 44-64444, from the 112th FS, was Capt. George Bleimes who had flown B-25 Mitchells with the USAAF in the Mediterranean

during WWII. The four aircraft made various passes but then Bleimes found he had a problem with the Merlin. Leaving the formation, he radioed he was coming in for a landing. However, he was coming in too fast so he applied throttle in an attempted go-around. The Merlin did not respond but the aircraft briefly got airborne again, bounced over a hill and went through a fence before coming down in a wheat field on George Kuhar's farm.

As soon as the F-51H touched down, the propeller and nose case of the Merlin departed the Mustang, doing some damage to the airframe. The plane hit hard and virtually every portion of the F-51H was damaged. Captain Bleimes got out of the cockpit with just a few scratches as rescuers from the local fire department pulled up. The Mustang was later classified as destroyed. **MI**

F-51H 44-64444 down in a hay field on 19 July 1953. Years later, Capt. Bleimes recalled, "On a Sunday, while attending a National Guard drill, I was requested to fill in as a participant in a demonstration flight at the dedication ceremonies for the opening of the new Canton-Akron Airport. I accepted and joined three Mansfield 164th FS pilots. We flew as a simulated combat flight of four. After several maneuvers, my Mustang developed some mechanical problems that I could not fully overcome."

