

CIVVIE Street

MUSTANG COLOR SCHEMES BEFORE TODAY'S MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR RESTORATIONS
BY DOUG FISHER

This magnificent photograph really defines what "Civvie Street" is all about. Before some elements of society discovered the usefulness of paint spray cans, such devices were in common use by the owners of freshly-purchased surplus military aircraft — and this can clearly be seen on P-51D 44-73428 N12065.

Photographed at Long Beach Airport in southern California on 12 October

1963, the field was a paradise for ex-military aircraft with over a hundred such planes scattered around the very large airport. These planes varied from those based at the field, to aircraft receiving maintenance, to others undergoing major airframe modifications, and those that were — for the lack of a better term — simply rotting. This is evidenced by the oil-splattered Catalina flown by C-Air in the immediate background to the (although it can barely be seen) C-Air Flying Fortress parked next to the PBY. With paint stripped and the aluminum skin brightened a bit, the markings for the Illinois Air National Guard's 169th Fighter Squadron can be discerned. So, does this mean the civilian owner picked the plane up at the famous McClellan AFB P-51 auction? Not exactly. Note the "118" on the vertical tail. This signifies that the aircraft was GN 118 with the *Fuerza Aerea de la Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua* and was acquired from the American government along with a number of other Mustangs (at least seven were noted as being obtained in late May 1958 — probably the majority came from McClellan). This was one of the Mustangs acquired by Will Martin in mid-1963 and was given the registration N6342T was assigned on 8 July 1963. Our astute Mustang readers will immediately note that this is one of the N#s assigned to surplus RCAF Mustangs. However, it appears that this number was never assigned to an RCAF bird and was picked up by Martin. Soon after, it became N12065. On 11 April 1965, the aircraft was damaged in a hard landing at Madison, Wisconsin, when the main landing gear collapsed. In 1966, it was purchased by Lefty Gardner but he quickly resold the plane on 22 July 1967 to J.G. Ghormley of Fort Worth, Texas. Ghormley did not live long to enjoy his new prize. He was the mayor of Edgely Village, a suburb of Fort Worth, and on 18 November he was out practicing landings and takeoffs from the Brownwood Airport. The Mustang was circling in the traffic pattern and the pilot let the airspeed decay. The P-51D stalled, snapped, and spun. It exploded on impact. Probable cause was listed as pilot failed to obtain/maintain flying speed; lack of familiarity with aircraft. Will's adventures with the Nicaraguan Mustangs and other military aircraft is related in the excellent *So I Bought An Air Force* which is available through the Aviation Book Club. See the advertisement in this issue — remember this is a signed limited edition and supplies are running low.



Merlin at full tilt, Steve Hinton blasts off in P-51D-30-NA 44-74932 N345 at Chino during September 1987 following restoration by Fighter Rebuilders. P-51D-30-NA 44-74923 last saw military service with the 168th Fighter-Bomber Squadron of the Illinois ANG. Aircraft was sold surplus at McClellan and became N5438V. The plane went through a couple of owners until being illegally exported to Salvador for the Soccer War in 1969. The aircraft was noted as being returned to the USA in damaged condition during 1974 when it was obtained by Don Alderson and registered N132. It was eventually rebuilt to flying shape as N100DD. It was purchased in 1981 by John Sandberg and raced at Reno as *Topsy Too* (in reference to Sandberg's P-63 racer). In 1983, the Merlin let go during a Heat race. The plane was being flown by veteran pilot Chuck Hall who pulled off a skillful belly landing and walked away without injury. The plane was not so lucky. It was taken apart and trucked to Chino where it was repaired by Fighter Rebuilders. During this time period, it was purchased by Gary Levitz and reregistered N345 Race 38. In 1994, it was once again reregistered — this time as N6395. Placed for sale, the Mustang quickly sold and in 1995 it was crated and shipped to The Netherlands for the Early Bird Collection. The Mustang remained in storage for many years but finally flew again in March 2012.

