

It was a typical spring day in central Texas. The sky was a soft powder blue with just a few wisps of bright white mare's tails to lend some definition. The date was 25 March 1944 and the location was Hensley Field, Grand Prairie, Texas. The base had been established back in 1928 when the city of Dallas, already seeing the main airport of Love Field becoming overly busy, purchased a chunk of land in then leased it to the US Army as an Air Corps training field. Major William Hensley, an aviation officer for the 8th Corps Army Area, had helped select the site and after his untimely death the new field was named in his honor.

Once Hensley Field was operational, the Army shut down training operations at Love and moved them to Hensley Field. Operations proceeded at a leisurely pace in the early 1930s but as the decade progressed, it was becoming obvious that the world was heading to war. On 28 September 1940, the Federal Government's Defense Plant Corporation began construction of what would become a very large aircraft manufacturing plant on the northwest corner of the field.

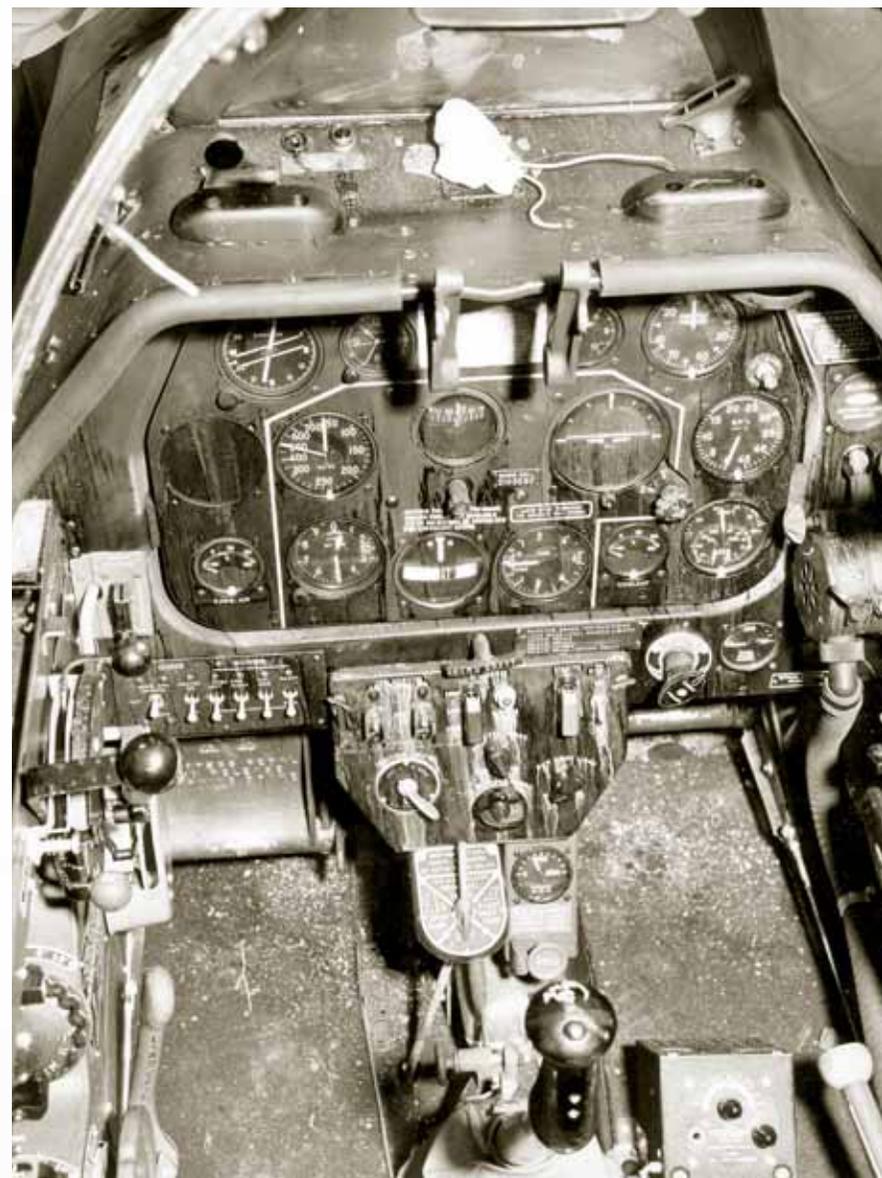


Typical crash-landing damage to the scoop area.

This was part of the Roosevelt Administration's plan to greatly increase the strength and size of the American military. Part of the plan included building new production plants far from the coasts in order to make enemy attacks as difficult as possible. North American Aviation became the lease-holder of the new plant, known as Plant A, which was a modern 1,000,000-sq-ft facility that initially began building AT-6/SNJ trainers. It was known as North American Dallas, even though located at Grand Prairie. At its height, NAA Dallas employed 39,000 workers.

# DOWN & OUT AT HENSLEY FIELD

ROUTINE PRODUCTION FIRST FLIGHT ENDS IN A CRASH-LANDING  
BY HOWARD CARTER



The size of the field enabled numerous other organizations to operate and the US Navy used Hensley as a training base, thus becoming NAS Dallas. By 1942, NAS Dallas had a total of 20 Outlying Landing Fields (OLS) and five of these were paved. The USAAF also had a portion of the field and used it to train ferry pilots. However, the main focal point of activity was North American and during the war the company would churn out a stunning 12,967 Texans, 4552 Mustangs, and 299 F-6 photo variants. A major part of America's "Arsenal of Democracy," today the local government is now considering using a large part of the disused area of the field as a homeless encampment.

However, going back to 25 March — since the weather was so perfect there was a lot of test flying going on at the NAA facility as new aircraft were checked out before being sent to the combat fronts.

George S. Annis was a civilian test pilot

As with most aircraft accidents of the time, the cockpit (if still intact) was photographed to check instruments, control settings, etc.

Classic Mustang belly landing. As can be seen, 42-103955 suffered a fair amount of damage including a destroyed propeller (the Merlin was certainly replaced), damaged cowl sections, crushed belly scoop area, and distorted fuselage sections. Note how the windscreen has been hazed by the smoke and flames. The access panel immediately ahead of the windscreen had been removed to check for the source of the fire.

