

MUSTANGS OF THE WHITE CROSS

THE HISTORY OF THE MUSTANG IN SWISS SERVICE AND AN EXAMINATION OF THE ONLY WARBIRD MUSTANG FLOWN — BRIEFLY — IN SWISS COLORS

BY RICHARD PAVER

During September 2014, the Swiss Air Force commemorated their 100-year anniversary with a very special airshow at Payerne. The event was held over two consecutive weekends and attracted huge crowds with a very extensive line up of airshow participants. Of particular interest for Mustang enthusiasts was the appearance of P-51D Mustang 44-72773, which had been specially painted in a one-off Swiss Air Force commemorative scheme marked as J-901 especially for the Payerne airshow.

This particular Mustang was very well known to British enthusiasts since it was based in the United Kingdom between

1987 and 2009, carrying the civil registration G-SUSY. The Swiss paint scheme was applied with special permission of the Swiss Air Force and was only retained for the duration of the Payerne commemorative event after which the Mustang was then returned to its usual color scheme of *Lucky Lady VII*.

Between 2009 and 2016, this Mustang was owned by Christop Nothiger from Zurich and was based with Max Alpha Aviation at Bremgarten, Germany, where it is maintained by Meier Motors and regularly flown around various European shows with its appearances being managed through

The Mustang briefly resplendent in its Swiss Air Force markings and in company with an ex-Swiss AF Hawker Hunter.

served and stored for future reuse. So was it with our subject aircraft. It was flown to Kelly AAF in Texas where it went into storage with hundreds of other Mustangs.

It remained in storage until 1951 — the Korean War was now in full swing and Mustangs were being pulled from storage in large numbers — when it was allocated to the 131st Fighter-Bomber Wing at George AFB in Victorville, California. In 1953, it was flown to Norton AFB and perhaps overhauled before being issued to a new unit. In February 1954, it was moved to the 182nd Fighter Squadron of the Texas Air National Guard (ANG) at Brooks AFB in San Antonio, Texas. By 1957, she had become obsolete for ANG service and was sold as part of a batch of 29 surplus ANG Mustangs to the Nicaraguan Air Force who operated it for the next five-years with the serial as GN-120.

In 1963, the Nicaraguan Mustangs were being retired and this particular aircraft was purchased as one of a batch by Will Martin (see related article in this issue) and returned to the USA to be operated as a civilian aircraft registered N12066.

In 1966, Isaac Newton "Junior" Burchinal's Flying Tigers Museum at Paris, Texas, acquired the Mustang. Part of Junior's mission was to check out pilots in a variety of Warbirds, including his B-17G, so Junior installed a very crude set of dual controls in the back of the P-51D and gave instruction and check outs in the aircraft, which had now been painted in wildly inaccurate markings of *Lou IV*. However, it was one of the first Mustangs to attempt a WWII paint scheme. The modified Mustang joined Junior's FG-1D Corsair, which he had also modified with crude dual con-

Classic Aircraft Displays.

P-51D-25-NA USAAF 44-72773 was built in late 1944 at the North American Inglewood plant with the NAA construction number 122-39232. Records indicate that the fighter was accepted by the USAAF on 13 February 1945 and flown to Newark in March. Some sources state the aircraft was then flown to Italy. This is incorrect.

At Newark, the plane was partially disassembled, covered with preservative, and then scheduled for shipment to Italy. Did this happen? It is unclear. If the aircraft did arrive in Italy, then the war was almost over. Further notes indicate the Mustang was back in the USA by August, if indeed it had ever left.

With the end of the Second World War, readers of this magazine know that a great deal of America's aerial force was flown to storage centers to be scrapped within a few years.

However, certain aircraft like the Mustang

and the Douglas A-26 Invader were deemed of post-war value and they were flown to holding areas — strategic reserve centers — where they were pre-