THE AMERICAN AIRPOWER MUSEUM HAS ACQUIRED A VERY INTERESTING MUSTANG

Back in the Sky

BY MICHAEL O'LEARY

Matt Jackson climbing out of Van Nuys on 6 February in the American Airpower Museum's P-51D N51HR.

"You have to take a look at this," said Pete Regina. I was visiting Pete Regina Aviation at Van Nuys Airport to examine three Mustangs that Pete was working on in his hangar. One particular aircraft had drawn our attention since it had arrived with all its original paperwork. What does that mean? Basically, every surviving Mustang has a long and complex history. After all, we are flying and restoring fighter aircraft that are all over seven-decades old. For an operational aircraft, that means a huge amount of maintenance, repair work, and modification has gone into each and every airframe.

Pete picked up a stack of paperwork that was about one-foot thick. "In all my years working on and flying P-51s, I have never seen anything like this," stated Regina. What Pete had was a remarkable historical record. It was each and every page of paperwork involved with P-51D-20-NA USAAF 44-63542. And I mean *every* page. The first document was from when the aircraft rolled out of the North American factory in Inglewood, California. That group of pages listed work that needed to be done to completed Mustangs.

As we have mentioned numerous times, America's massive aircraft production facilities were organic and by that I mean there were constant changes going on. These changes were coming from the engineers, from NAA reps stationed with front line units, and from USAAF officials. There were constant upgrades that could conceivably slow down production and this was something no one wanted in the middle of a global war. So, when 44-63542 rolled our of the factory doors it was a complete, ready to go fighter aircraft. However, the powers to be had specified that the plane needed certain new modifications and these had to be done before the USAAF would accept the fighter.

Thus, 44-63542 was towed over to a large section of NAA ramp covered by camouflage netting where workers got busy to comply with the paperwork that came with the airplane. These were pre-printed forms that listed the work that needed to be done. Once the work was finished, the NAA employee would either sign-off on the form or use an inspector's stamp to indicate the work had been successfully accomplished. What type of work did 44-63542 need before acceptance?

The North American form was called the "Technical Instruction Compliance Record" and for 44-63542 it was dated 24 November 1944, because that was the date of purchase of the Mustang. Work started on these items on 15 November and included:

- Removal of carburetor air screens.
- Removal of circuit breaker from airplane generator systems.
- Securing of shock mounting elements radio sets (the sets are then listed by designation).
- Replacement of the AN-820-A caps on the A-1 pressure transmitter systems.
- Reinforcement of horizontal stabilizer and fin.
- Inspection of landing gear uplock and main gear fairing door locks.
- Dive limitations — P-51B, P-51C, and P-51D (this would have been a cockpit placard).
- Removal of Type G-1 pressure signal, assemblies, and warning light.
- Installation of quick-disconnect assembly on aircraft storage batteries (this work was not done and noted by "Rescinded TO 01-1-1").
- Modification of radio receiver BC-624-A for suppression of noise — SCR-522A (this was also noted as "Rescinded TO 01-1-1").

Matt taking the runway at Van Nuys for the aircraft's first flight after IRAN and other work by Pete Regina Aviation.