

Let's Talk About the P-82/F-82 Twin Mustang

by Ralph J. Ferrusi

I've been a "Mustang nut" since I was a kid: more specifically, the Rolls Royce Merlin-engined P-51D/F-51D Mustang. None of the other variants particularly charmed me: the Allison-engined "A" and "B" models, nor, the Merlin-engined "C" model with a conventional early World War II P-40-like cockpit canopy. I'm not alone: there are zillions of Mustang nuts out there; I've talked to quite a few of them. I/we love the sound of the Merlin: the rumble/roar/whine of it is like no other sound.

Hold the phone: near the end of World War II another Mustang appeared out there: the P-82 Twin Mustang. Two Mustangs stuck together: pretty much joined at the hip!!! Hadda be twice as good, right??? Nope... Let's do some digging to find out why.

First things first, I've always—as a World War II aviation "enthusiast"—been aware of the P/F-82. But, a lot of other WW II planes trumped it: the Corsair, the B-17's, the—yup—B-24 Liberator, the Douglas Dauntless. Probably, I must admit, even the FW-190. Irregardless (I love this non-word), I do have an F-82 story to tell.

But first, here's a "Reader's Digest" version of the Twin Mustang's Story:

The North American F-82 Twin Mustang was the last American piston-engined fighter ordered into production by the U.S. Air Force. Based on the P-51H, it was originally designed as a very-long-range World War II escort fighter—able to travel over 2,000 miles without refueling—and intended to escort B-29's on 2,000+ mile missions from bases in the Solomons or the Phillipines to the Japanese mainland that was at the time beyond the range of the

P-51. Both cockpits of some P-82's were fully equipped so they could be flown from either position, allowing alternate control on long flights, but later night fighter versions had controls in the left cockpit only, with a radar operator on the right. World War II ended before the first production P-82's became operational.

But, during the Korean War, Japan-based F-82s were among the first USAF aircraft to operate over Korea. And, the first three North Korean aircraft destroyed by U.S. forces were shot down by F-82's, the first being a North-Korean Yak-11, by a 68th Fighter Squadron Twin Mustang. F-82's accounted for 20 enemy aircraft: four air, 16 ground. Ten F-82's were lost in Korea.

Back to 1943

In October, the North American Aircraft design team began working on slapping two P-51's together. Early P-82's were powered by the Mustang's Packard-built Rolls Royce Merlin V-1650. But, the Packard plants were dismantled when the War ended, so later models were powered by the Allison V-1710-100, resulting—surprise, surprise—in a lower top speed and poorer high-altitude performance. This gave the P-82 the dubious distinction of being one of the few aircraft in U.S. Military history where the earlier versions (made trainers) were faster than the fighter version...

And...the left propeller turned opposite to the right propeller, turning upward approaching the center wing, but...during it's first flight (attempt...) the aircraft refused to become airborne!!! After a month of "head scratching", the engines and props were exchanged, their rotation meeting on the downward turn. And, the plane took off...

Some Facts and Figures

Cruising speed: 286 mph.
Maximum speed: 461 mph.
Range: 2,240 miles!
Service ceiling: 38,900 feet.
Armament: six .50 caliber M3 Browning machine guns.
Cost per plane: \$215,154.00

The Air Force accepted a total of 272 P/F-82's between 1945 and 1949. They were all manufactured at North American's Inglewood, California plant. There were eight production variants, A-H. In 1948 all P-82's were re-designated F-82.

All in all, the Twin Mustang had a very short operational life, being phased out of service by Republic F-84 Thunderjets and in Korean combat by Lockheed F-94 Starfires. Then they were either scrapped, declared "excess" and/or sent to storage or disposal. The last Twin Mustang (46-377) was officially retired on November 12, 1953.

Surviving F-82's Airworthy:

XP-82 44-83887 was restored to flying status by aircraft restorer Tom Reilly, at Douglas Municipal Airport in Douglas, Georgia. After ten years, 207,000 man-hours and (nobody's saying how many) \$\$\$\$\$\$, its first post-restoration flight took place New Years Eve 2018. It was the first time it flew since December 14, 1949. Half of this plane were found on a farm in Ohio. The other half--an entire wing and fuselage--were fabricated. A left-turning V-1650 Merlin was found in a shed in Mexico City, and a woman in Tampa Florida (somehow) possessed a unique-to-F-82's cockpit canopy!!!

On display:

•F-82B 44-65162 is on display at the National Museum of the United States Air Force at Wright-Patterson AFB in Dayton, Ohio. It had been a "gate guard" outside Lackland AFB for many years, was acquired by the Commemorative Air Force in 1966, and stalled while landing in 1987. It arrived at the museum in 2009 and was restored to the appearance of the F-82G that shot down a North Korean La-7 on June 27, 1950, near Kimpo Air Base in South Korea.

•F-82B 44-65168 Betty Jo - Displayed at the same Museum. It was delivered to the museum on June 21, 1957. On February 27, 1947, P-82B Betty Jo, flown by Colonel Robert E. Thacker made history when it flew nonstop from Hawaii to New York, 5,051 miles (!!!) without refueling, in 14 hours and 32 minutes, averaging 347.5 mph. WOW!!!

•F-82E 46-0262 - is on display as a "gate guard" at Lackland AFB.

Under Restoration

•F-82E 46-0256, an intact airframe formerly located on the same farm in Ohio the XP-82 was at (somebody in Ohio collected Twin Mustangs???!), is currently under restoration to flying status by James Harker in Anoka, Minnesota.

'The F-82 and Me' From Boating on the Hudson and Beyond, June 2018, Pages 45-46:

"I once sat in the radio operator's seat in a Stewart Air Force Base 105th Airlift Wing C-5A heading for Lackland AFB, a Brigadier General in the left seat, a full bird Colonel in the right. I was like a kid on Christmas morning when they pushed those throttles forward on Stewart's LONG runway."

In Lackland I sat next to the General on our Air Force tour bus, and, spotting a static-displayed F-82, I excitedly poked him in the ribs and exclaimed, "There's a Twin Mustang!!!" After he recovered his breath, he said "You know more about planes than I do."

A Twin Mustang in the Sky Again

I watched a video of XP-82 44-83887 airborne (Google "F-82 Twin Mustangs"). I expected to be thrilled by the sight, and sound, of two Mustangs stuck together. Oddly, I must admit, I wasn't: Allison's, not Merlin's??? To me, the P-51D is still The Most Perfect Airplane, Ever. A tough act to follow, even by a "twin". The F-82 served nobly in Korea, and beyond, and I'm very glad there is, finally, one flying again. I truly hope, someday, to actually see this now-very-rare aircraft in the skies, and, be thrilled.

Get in touch with Ralph at:
rjferrusi@frontiernet.net



Photo: U.S. Air Force