

SETTING A **STANDARE**

AND MIKE VADEBONCOEUR
BEGAN THE MODERN
MUSTANG RESTORATION
MOVEMENT

Ay back in the late 1980s, an event took place that would have a profound impact on the Warbird world—but we

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did not know it at the time. In 1981, 1980s, an event took place that would have a profound impact on the Warbird Warbird — World — Butch was able to purchase the aircraft and move it back to his home in Illinois. Always interested in ex-military aircraft, Butch had acquired an AT-6 in 1975 but by 1986 that air-

"What's the use of a warplane that can't fight" WWII combat pilot Clyde East once said. He was referring to aircraft like the F-4/F-5 series of Lightning photo recon aircraft that carried no armament. When the F-6 Mustang completed its mission, it could turn on the enemy with a full load of .50-cal weapons along with rockets and bombs on underwing hard points.

craft was — and putting this charitably — in need of some work. That is when he hired a young Mike Vadeboncoeur. Mike was in high school, wanted to work on airplanes, but — perhaps most importantly — he was obsessed with the idea of returning WWII aircraft to their original condition.

The initial idea was to do a firewall forward restoration on the Texan but Mike's desire to return the aircraft to original pushed the project forward and the plane would go on to win the EAA Oskhosh Reserve Grand Champion Trophy while young Mike



Beautifully restored camera ports fitted with original equipment.

Clyde East's impressive scoreboard.

was awarded the Golden Wrench Trophy (Mike would go on to establish the world-famous Midwest Aero Restorations).

Then, it was time to take the "barn find" Mustang, put it in the hangar, and get busy. Mike convinced Butch to follow the same course as with the Texan. The Mustang was 44-84786, one of a batch of 136 aircraft converted to F-6D-25-NT armed tactical reconnaissance configuration. Away they went, and what an adventure it was.

The final result was a 100-point World War Two Mustang — an aircraft that suddenly established a completely new level of Warbird restoration. Accurate in every detail and fitted with all its original equipment, the Mustang, now registered N51BS, took off on 18 June 1993 from Danville Airport under the command of John Dilley. After the test flying was completed, it was time for Oshkosh, and Butch took home the Grand Champion Trophy while Mike added another Golden Wrench.

This aircraft firmly established the trend of returning Mustangs to original combat configuration, but Butch's Mustang will probably remain unique because it is the only authentic F-6D. The airplane was finished in the markings and configuration of Clyde B. East's Lil Margaret — an aircraft in which Clyde obtained 13 confirmed victories over Luftwaffe aircraft. Nothing stays the same forever, and Butch has made the reluctant decision to sell his now-famous Mustang. After all, he has enjoyed this incredible aircraft for over a quarter-century!

John Lane stacks the Mustang high to display rocket and bomb underwing hard points.

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