North American P-51 Mustangs.

A series of special pages focusing on the significant machines, events and people of powered flight's first 100 years.

**THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN**

On Dec. 19, 1941, after pressures from the courts, national civil rights leaders and some members of Congress, the United States Army Air Force began a program in Alabama to train black airmen as military pilots. In the Tuskegee Institute, the renowned school and research laboratory founded by Booker T. Washington. The first class of Tuskegee fighter pilots formed with the 332nd Fighter Group and began combat duty in North Africa. Under the command of Maj. Gen. Benjamin O. Davis Jr., the 332nd earned the Medal of Honor. The Tuskegee Airmen earned 150 citations, Legions of Merit, 14 Bronze Stars, 15 Distinguished Service Crosses, more than 3600 medals and citations, and 262 jets shot down by the Allies. By the end of the war, the Tuskegee Airmen had placed 111 enemy fighters and bombers out of action. The Tuskegee Airmen saw some of the most intense combat missions of the war. On average, 40% of the Tuskegee Airmen were killed in action or died in combat.

**P-51 Specs & Stats**

| Manufacturer | North American
|--------------|-----------------
| Model | Mustang
| Model 1941 | P-51
| Model 1944 | P-51D
| Weight | 6,500 lbs. max.
| Length | 37 ft. 4 in.
| Height | 11 ft. 7 in.
| Max. Speed | 425 mph, max.
| Armament | 6 .50-caliber machine guns, 140 rounds (44 rounds/each gun), 400 rounds total

**The P-51 Mustang**

The P-51 Mustang was a single-engine fighter aircraft used by the United States Army Air Forces during World War II. It was developed as a successor to the P-40 Warhawk and was one of the most successful fighter aircraft of the war, with 10,539 aircraft produced. The P-51 was known for its high performance, particularly at high altitude, and was used in a variety of roles, including fighter, fighter-bomber, and reconnaissance.

**‘Big Jim’ Howard and the 354th Fighter Group**

The 354th Fighter Group, which consisted of the 317th, 320th, and 360th Fighter Squadrons, was known as “Gator Muscle” because of its reputation for aggressive and successful combat operations. The group was based in Italy and flew missions over Germany and France, participating in some of the most intense battles of the war. The group's pilots, led by Maj. George Preddy, became some of the war's most decorated fighter pilots, earning numerous awards and citations for their combat achievements.

**Heroes**

The list of heroes includes some of the most successful fighter pilots of the war, such as Maj. George Preddy and Maj. Howard D. Bragg. These pilots achieved a high number of victories against enemy aircraft and played a significant role in the outcome of the war for the Allies. The list of heroes also recognizes the contributions of Tuskegee Airmen, who broke racial barriers and flew in integrated units, leading to the future integration of the armed forces.

**P-51D Specifications**

**Performance:**

- **Engine:** Packard-built Rolls-Royce “Merlin” V-1650 of 1,695 hp.
- **Weight:** 6,500 lbs. max.
- **Length:** 37 ft. 4 in.
- **Height:** 11 ft. 7 in.
- **Max. Speed:** 425 mph.
- **Armament:** 6 .50-caliber machine guns, 140 rounds (44 rounds/each gun), 400 rounds total.