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"Twilight Tear"
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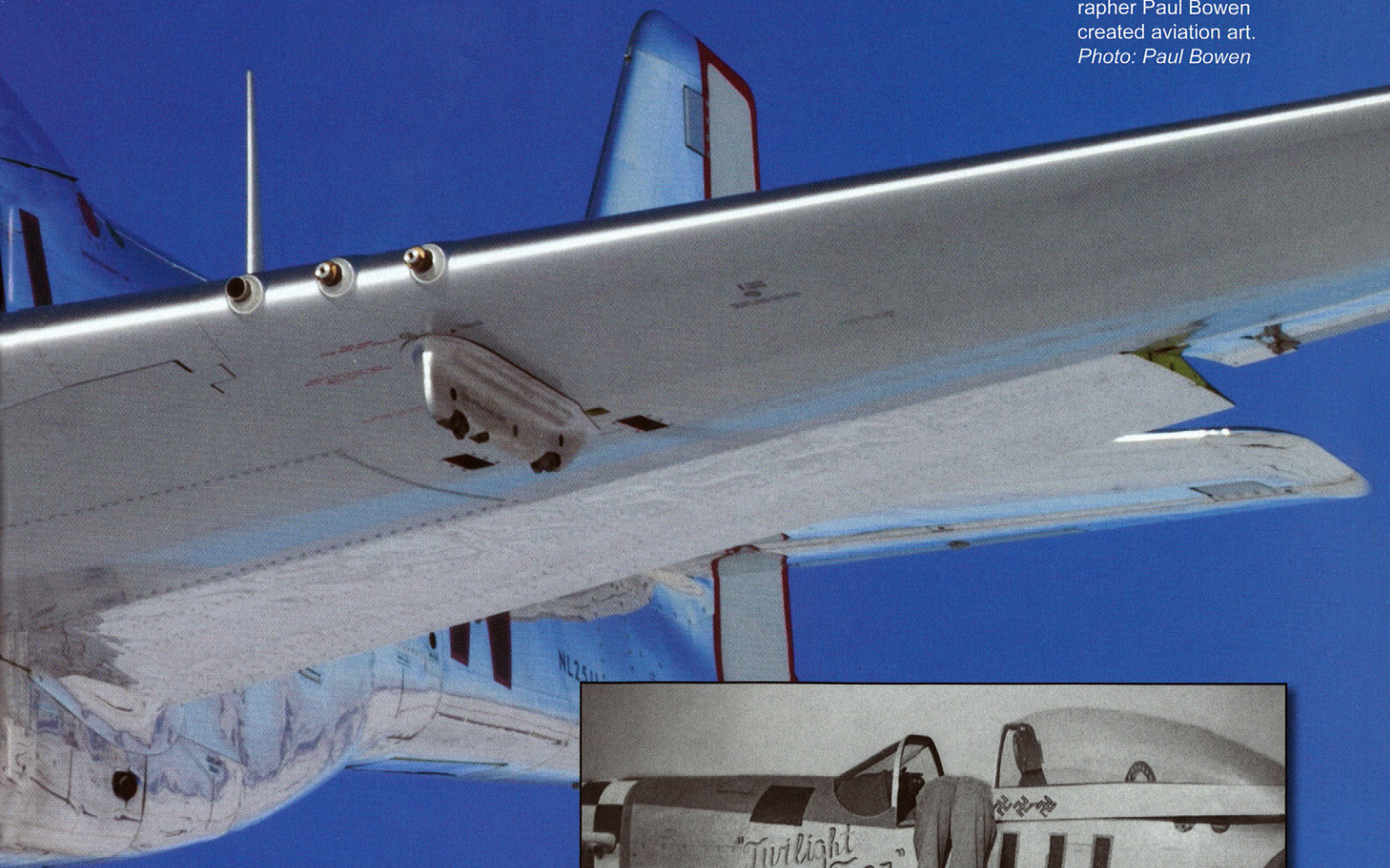


"Twilight Tear" DECONSTRUCTED

Story by **Andrea Eldridge** with Photography by
Paul Bowen, Xavier Meal, and Greg Morehead

MILITARY FIGHTERS with combat history are a rarity, more often than not scrapped onsite following the end of the war. Therefore they must be found, salvaged and shipped from other foreign countries at great time and expense prior to seeing the skies over American soil, thrilling audiences and reviving wartime memories from the pages of history. As collectors become more sophisticated and maintenance shops more meticulous, aircraft combat history can be unveiled through detailed restoration and can even be a consideration prior to ownership. In this case, aircraft combat history is a sweet surprise discovered through demanding research. *"Twilight Tear"* possesses a colorful past, having flown for no less than three military services, providing an opportunity to educate those who see her at airshows across the country on the value of freedom.

(main-photo) Ron Fagen flying the P-51 Mustang *"Twilight Tear"*. In 2011 the restoration by Tri-State Aviation and Air Corps Aviation won the Grand Champion – WWII Award at EAA AirVenture in Oshkosh, WI. Evan Fagen, Ron's son, flew the photo plane while photographer Paul Bowen created aviation art. Photo: Paul Bowen



► (inset) While *"Twilight Tear"* was being restored this photo was found on ebay. It is the only known photograph that shows the original nose art. It was likely taken shortly after the artwork was applied because neither the crew chief nor pilot's name was yet painted on the Mustang.





▲ (inset) The restoration team on hand for the first flight from left to right: Dennis Obawa, Mark Tisler, Erik Hokuf, Ron Fagen, Eric Trueblood, Randy Carlson, Aaron Schillenger, and Neil Petik.
Photo: Kevin Eldridge

Where do you see a Mustang tied to a snowplow for a full-power engine run-up? Only in North Dakota. Photo: Kevin Eldridge



▲ Kevin Eldridge after taxiing in from the first flight following the restoration of "Twilight Tear"
Photo: Ron Fagen

1944–1946: Lt. Hubert "Bill" Davis

In 1944 new Mustangs rolled out of the factory at North American Aviation in Inglewood, California as part of a batch of 1,000 P-51D-20-NA ordered by the US military. One was transferred to the US Army Air Force with Serial No. 44-63864, arrived in England on December 14, and was delivered to the Duxford-based 78th Fighter Group, which was in the process of replacing its P-47 Thunderbolts with Mustangs.

Lt. Hubert "Bill" Davis of the "Duxford Eagles" named it "Twilight Tear" after a Kentucky filly born in 1941, whose exceptional performance earned the mare Horse of the Year honors in 1944. He flew the majority of his 35 missions in Twilight Tear and together they went on to three victories over Nazi aircraft. The following accounts are taken from his actual combat reports.

From the combat report March 2, 1945 where Davis shot down his first Me 109:

I was flying Cargo Yellow Two on Captain's Higginbottom's wing, heading south-east at 21,000 feet, when enemy aircraft, approximately 24 Me 109's, were reported at six o'clock low at 15,000 feet. Cargo Squadron did a 180 left and then started a descent to 15,000 ft. Capt. Higginbottom

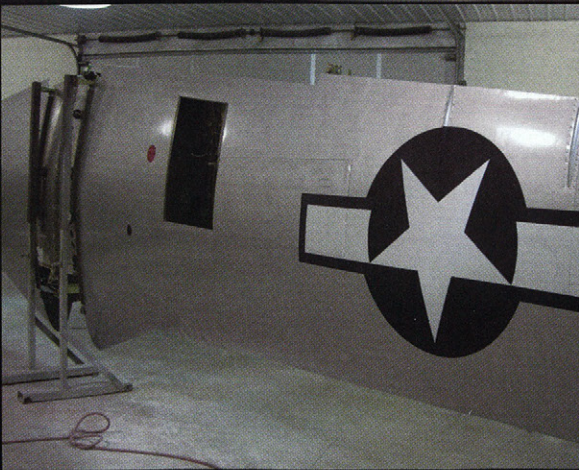
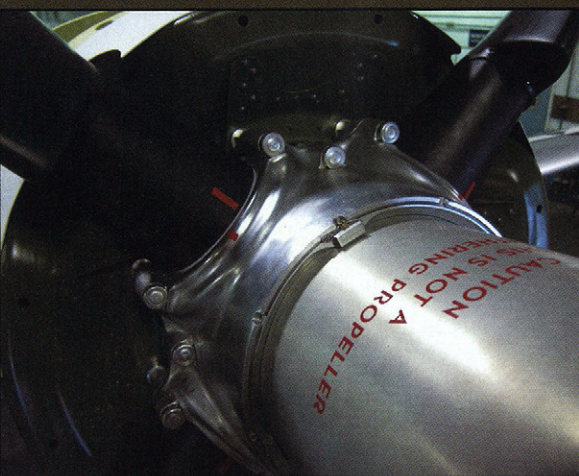
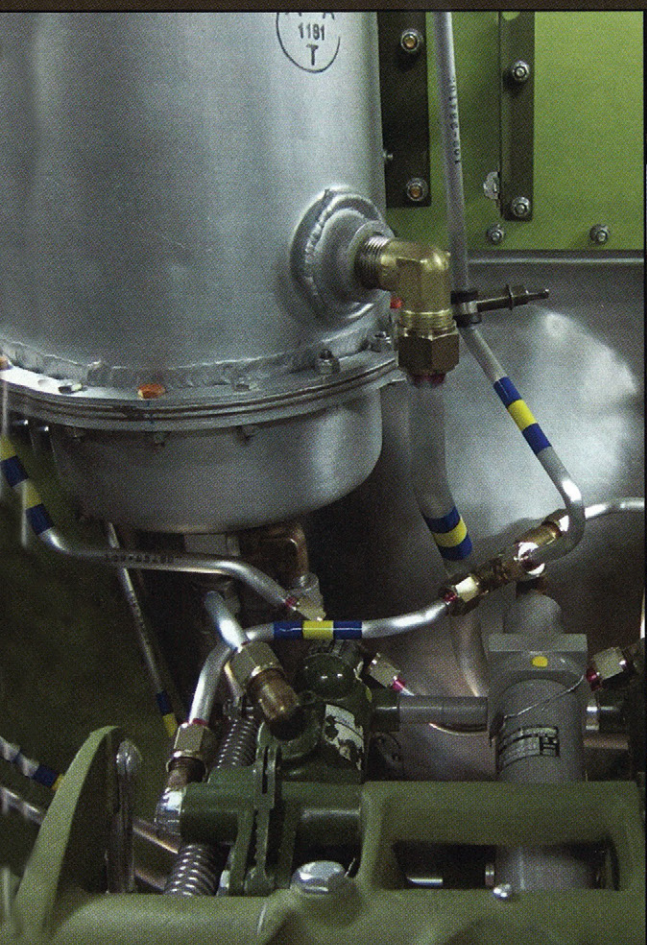
turned into a flight of four Me 109's, but held his fire when number four proved to be a P-51. Capt. Higginbottom went after one 109 and I turned into two 109's coming at me from my right. I went after the number two man and after completing a 360 to the left, I was able to hit him with about a 30 degree deflection shot. He was in a climbing turn at the time. I saw hits on the wings, around the cockpit, and on the engine. The plane turned over, pouring out dense black smoke, and went spiralling straight down. The landing gear came down. I followed on his tail, shooting until I "hit" about 6,000 feet, then pulled off to one side as I was going about 400 mph. I followed him down through clouds and saw the plane hit. I did not see the pilot bail out nor did I see any chute open. I climbed back up to about 14,000 ft to where the flight was still in progress. I saw two 109's down on the top of the clouds and dived on them. I fired at the wing man and saw hits on the wings and fuselage, but I was closing too fast so pulled up to keep from over-shooting. I did not see what became of the plane.

On March 19, Davis scored two more Me 109s on a mission near Osnabruck:

I was flying Cargo Yellow Three position in Cargo Squadron. We had just dropped tanks, and had climbed from 8,000 feet to about 11,000 feet going up to engage 109's above us. I looked over my left shoulder



Ron Fagen flies "Twilight Tear" over the snow covered countryside near Granite Falls, MN. It is a scene indicative of 1944 Europe, when this plane flew combat missions with the 78th Fighter Group. Photo: Paul Bowen



◀ (middle-right) Some of the many details that won this restoration multiple awards at Oshkosh were the factory stencils throughout the aircraft, including those on the Hamilton-Standard propeller blades and spinner hub dome. Photo: Aircorps Aviation Collection

◀ (left) Original factory stamps and stencils were applied throughout the aircraft and all plumbing connections were made using AC fittings rather than modern AN fittings. Photo: Aircorps Aviation Collection

◀ (bottom-right) Wings in the paint shop. Photo: Aircorps Aviation Collection



▲ (top) Many P-51s attempt to blend stock gauges with modern avionics; possibly none have retained the factory configuration better. The modern radios (just above the control stick) are the only deviation. The restoration team fabricated a faceplate for the gauges originally located there – the artificial horizon and directional gyro – so it could be attached over the radios to complete the 100% stock presentation.

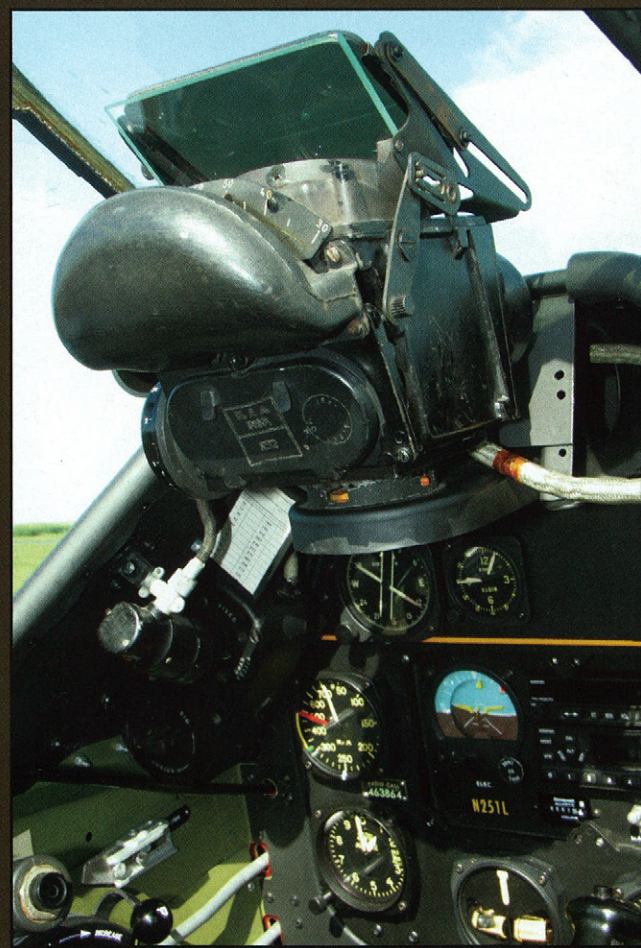
Photo: Xavier Meal

► (bottom-right) The K-14 gun sight, complete with sunshade, is fully functional. K-14 gun sights were a field modification. This one was installed in accordance with the original service bulletin, just as WWII mechanics did during the war.

Photo: Xavier Meal

to see where my wing-man was, and saw a Me 109 at 8 o'clock on me, approximately 1000 feet below me, going in the opposite direction. I immediately dove on him and he started a turn to the left. We had made about two 360 degree turns, when I was able to get in a burst at 90 degrees. I could not see if I hit him as he was blanketed by the nose of my plane. When I saw him again, he rolled over and started spiraling straight down. First his canopy came off, and then I saw him bail out. Something, it might have been part of his canopy, hit the right side of my windshield, cracking the glass. His plane went straight on in and exploded. I was still in an almost vertical dive so I went down and took a picture of the fire. On the way back up I saw a chute and took a picture of that.

By this time I had lost my wing-man. I climbed to 13,000 feet in order to join up with some other 51's or to find another German plane. I was heading East to where it looked like there were some 51's in the distance when I saw a 109 about 1000 feet above me and going the other way. He must have seen me turn after him, because he immediately started a climbing turn to the right, pulling a trail of smoke. I was closing on him and fired at about 900 yards (sic). I didn't see any hits. We did about another complete turn. I was right behind him at this time and just going to fire when the canopy came off and the pilot bailed out the left side. I followed the plane down and took a picture of the fire.



"Twilight Tear" won the Grand Champion-WWII Award at AirVenture 2011, as well as a Golden Wrench Award for Tri-State Aviation and Aircorps Aviation, and a Phoenix Award for Ron and Diane Fagen. The Mustang will be one of the featured warbirds at Fagen Fighters' new museum, which will celebrate its grand opening at the annual air show at Granite Falls Airport on June 16, 2012. Photo: Paul Bowen

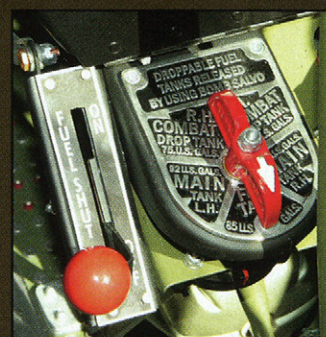


On April 25, 1945, "Twilight Tear" departed Duxford and was rerouted to accompany 12 Lancaster bombers on their way to drop tallboy bombs on Hitler's Eagle's Nest, thus taking part in the last mission flown by the 78th. Lt. Davis received orders to ship home and returned to New York in July of 1945.

While Lt. Hubert Davis was safely back home, the future of his Mustang, "Twilight Tear", was anything but certain. Most fighters and bombers operating in combat theatres were not returned to the United States; rather they were cut up in place on the tarmac—so much easier than shipping them home in one piece. Ron Fagen suggested, "There's probably three to a dozen P-51s left that actually saw combat." "Twilight Tear" moved on to Germany for storage for two years and then was again called to serve, this time in Sweden.

1947–1954: The Royal Swedish Air Force and Israeli Defense Forces

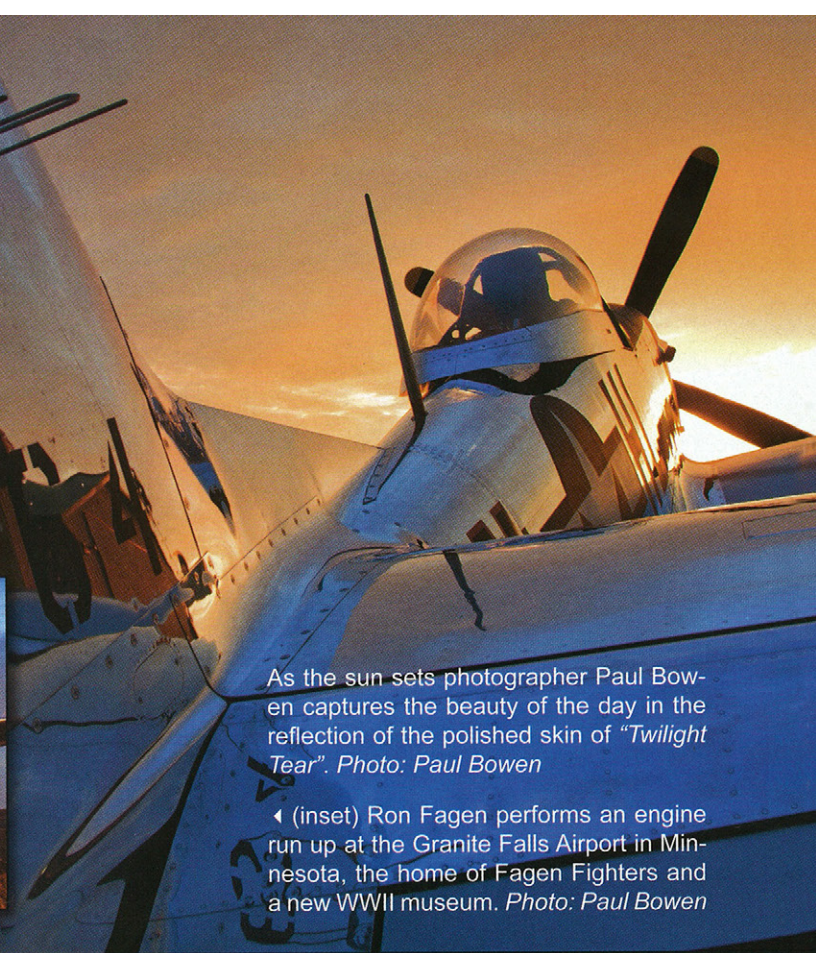
"Twilight Tear" was delivered to the Royal Swedish Air Force on June 13, 1947. She was assigned the new Swedish Serial No. Fv26158, but her exact duties remain a mystery. After four years of service she was one of only 25 Mustangs purchased by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). Then identified as IDFAF 3506, she was delivered February 9, 1953.



▲ (above) Close-up of the fuel selector switch and fuel shutoff. Photo: Xavier Meal

◀ (middle-left) The left side of the cockpit features the original first aid kit and flare gun mount. When needed the pilot would attach the flare gun to this mount so it could be fired without opening the canopy. Photo: Xavier Meal

◀ (bottom-left) The right side of the cockpit showing the original radio control panel and canopy hand crank. Photo: Xavier Meal



As the sun sets photographer Paul Bowen captures the beauty of the day in the reflection of the polished skin of "Twilight Tear". Photo: Paul Bowen

◀ (inset) Ron Fagen performs an engine run up at the Granite Falls Airport in Minnesota, the home of Fagen Fighters and a new WWII museum. Photo: Paul Bowen

▲ (top-left) Detailed inspection of the gear well shows another of the details that earned this Mustang its awards. All connectors in the plumbing of this Mustang use original AC fittings rather than the current AN standard. Photo: Aircorps Aviation

▲ (middle-left) Close-up of the "dog house" installation. Photo: Aircorps Aviation

► (middle-right) The engine access panels are removed for judging at AirVenture 2011. The judges were impressed by the original engine installation featuring all original stamps and stencils found on all Mustangs as they left the North American Aviation factory in the 1940s. Photo: Greg Morehead

► (bottom-right) An original M10 smoke generator, very rare today, was attached to Mustangs and utilized in the European Theater during WWII. Photo: Greg Morehead

With the 101 Squadron she possibly could have seen some combat in the mid-50s during the conflict with Egypt. Ultimately the IDF phased out its Mustangs for new jet fighters and relinquished "Twilight Tear" to Israel Aircraft Industries for storage. It was 1954 and back home Twilight Tear, the filly namesake, died.

1960–1963: The Bill Lear Years

While living with his father, William Lear Sr., in Geneva, Switzerland, in order to sell radio and autopilot systems to foreign airlines, and after having become the youngest pilot to race a Lockheed P-38 in the Bendix Trophy races, William Lear Jr. purchased the Mustang on July 18, 1960. After a busy flying schedule around Geneva he ultimately sold it to William Pearce of Fullerton, California, on December 11, 1962. He delivered the plane to Paris where the new owner authorized French pilot Roger Arnoud to ferry the P-51 across the Atlantic to the United States. Apparently unknown to William Pearce at the time, Roger Arnoud had never flown a Mustang. He crashed the airplane in Keflavik, Iceland on June 6, 1963, during what might possibly have been his first landing. The following text is from an internet post by Bill Lear:

Indeed, N-251L was my P-51. I bought it from the Israeli Air Force through Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI) who modified it to a two-place, installed all





new Lear avionic and autopilot systems, painted it and obtained FAA Limited Category Airworthiness (1960). I flew it from Tel Aviv to Athens across the Med (IFR) and from there to my home in Geneva, Switzerland where I kept it until I sold it to an American buyer (name forgotten) in 1963. I modified the aircraft by installing the Trans-Florida Aviation (Cavalier) tip-tanks and larger canopy.

The American buyer hired a French pilot to ferry the aircraft back to the U.S. This pilot had never flown a P-51 before. His first landing was at Keflavik, Iceland after a non-stop flight from Paris Toussus-le-Noble airport. The pilot flared too high and while at low airspeed apparently applied full 61" of noise. The aircraft rotated leftward, the wing struck the runway and the aircraft began to cartwheel down the runway. The engine broke off as did both wings and the aft fuselage leaving the cockpit section intact and on its side. There was no fire. The pilot was alive but during these violent maneuvers his head got pretty busted up. He later died of these injuries. He had worn no crash helmet and the shoulder-harness was found tied in a knot and dropped behind his seat. This was a survivable accident, but some folks know better than others.

The data plate from my P-51D, N-251L, which crashed in Iceland, was apparently removed by

someone as it is no longer there and, I am told, there is evidence of it having been chiseled off.

What confuses me is that another P-51D has been registered in Europe bearing the same serial number as mine (44-63864). There is evidently some mix-up here but I have a solution to discovering if the recently registered P-51 with the same S/N is indeed my former aircraft.

An examination of the wings should reveal the installation of two-to-three additional spars which were installed to accommodate the extra weight/load the TransFlorida 110 gal (ea) tiptank installation kit required. The wing skins were removed and replaced for this "no-small-job" installation. There should also be evidence of tank brackets, fuel line plumbing and electrical wiring—or the removal of same.

The additional wing spars are the key, however. If they ain't there, then that rebuilt airplane isn't my N-251L S/N 44-63864—period.

William P. Lear, Jr.

Ironically, as "Twilight Tear" the Mustang was stored in Iceland for some twenty years, Twilight Tear the thoroughbred was posthumously inducted into the National Museum of Racing's Hall of Fame—one now immortalized and the other seemingly forgotten.

▲ (top-right and middle right) Very few P-51 Mustangs today still have the original centerline fuel tank. "Twilight Tear" has a complete system, as it was originally manufactured; however the system is not used due to a post-war safety directive. When fully loaded the tank presented a center of gravity danger. Photo: Aircorps Aviation Collection

▲ (top-center) Restored 75 gallon drop tanks. Photo: Aircorps Aviation Collection

▲ (bottom-center) Original self sealing fuel tanks being installed. Photo: Aircorps Aviation Collection

▲ (top-left) Original oxygen system installation. Photo: Aircorps Aviation Collection



▲ (top left) One of the most unique displays at Oshkosh in 2011 was “*Twilight Tear*”, complete with the target banner used to test the fully functional Browning M2 machine guns.
Photo: Greg Morehead

▲ (top right) The Browning 50-caliber machine guns were fired using an electronic trigger. When the pilot pulled the trigger on the control stick the signal was transferred to the small silver gun solenoids on the top of each gun’s receiver, which triggered the gun’s firing mechanism. After test firing the guns these dummy receivers were installed before the aircraft could be flown.
Photo: Greg Morehead

1991–2005: Back to the United States and Restoration

Finally, after passing through the hands of Canadian Cham Gill on February 25, 1991, warbird restorer Ken Hake purchased the Mustang three months later on July 20 and shipped it back to Kansas and American soil. When Ken Hake decided to retire before restoring Serial No. 44-63864, he offered the project to his friends, Ron and Diane Fagen of Granite Falls, Minnesota, who purchased it in addition to several P-40s in various states, on October 14, 2005. The project was immediately registered with the FAA but relegated to the back of the hangar while other aircraft, including the P-38 *Ruff Stuff* and an Aleutian Tiger P-40, were restored.

Recognition as a result of meticulous historical research on the part of AirCorps Aviation, currently located in Bemidji, Minnesota, arrived after a long and thorough investigation, when the FAA affirmed that Serial No. 44-63864 belonged to the plane owned by Fagen Fighters—the authentic “*Twilight Tear*”. In the case of “*Twilight Tear*” it was proven that warbird restoration not only requires inspired artistic craftsmanship from the mechanics but an equally important academic effort from the historians and researchers able to navigate boxes of paperwork spanning several countries and dating back decades.

Restoration took place at Tri-State Aviation in Wahpeton, North Dakota, which was founded by Jerry Beck, who was greatly admired as a mentor to all that worked with him. Fagen Fighters had by this time already won several awards at EAA AirVenture, including Grand Champions for their Aleutian Island Tiger and Desert Shark P-40s. Over several years the “*Twilight Tear*” project rose to new heights and set a new standard for authenticity, with the attention down to the minutest detail. After having been invited by Ron Fagen to test fly the P-38 *Ruff Stuff* for the first time in 2007, Kevin Eldridge was again tapped as test pilot, this time in April of 2011, for the P-51 Mustang, “*Twilight Tear*”. Ron Fagen said, “I can fly a Mustang, but Kevin Eldridge is one of the best and experienced for testing first-time flown airplanes.”

Restoration reward arrived at Oshkosh when “*Twilight Tear*” was the recipient of the 2011 EAA Warbird Grand Champion, with an additional nod to both Tri-State and AirCorps Aviation with the Golden Wrench Award for the restoration, and Diane and Ron Fagen won the Phoenix Award. One of the outstanding and uniquely rare features on “*Twilight Tear*” as a modern-day restoration are the real .50 caliber machine guns mounted in the wings, which were actually fired for the first time in decades. After jumping through more bureaucratic hoops, which by now must be old

"Twilight Tear" was a huge attraction at Oshkosh as thousands of visitors were able to see close-up what was beneath the skin of a P-51 Mustang. This view shows the ammunition trays that fed the guns in the plane piloted by Lt. Hubert "Bill" Davis as he earned three aerial victories over German aircraft in the skies over Europe. Photo: Greg Morehead



► (inset) K-14 Gunsight showing lighted display on bore site board. Photo: Air Corps Aviation Collection



hat, a license from the Federal Bureau for Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) was acquired so the six Browning .50 caliber machine guns could be restored and fired on the ground. The Mustang's tail was jacked up so through the functioning K-14 gun sight installed in the aircraft could be located the target banner 75 yards away on a range built by Fagen's excavation company. Good times!

2012: Fagen Fighters and Beyond

The Fagen family's connection to WWII aircraft is a personal one. Ron Fagen reminisced, "My dad was in the 4th Infantry and participated in the Battle of the Bulge. He and two other guys were sitting in their little trench and the weather was horrible. They figured this is it, game over, you know. All of a sudden the sky opened up and here came a P-38 that strafed the enemy and saved their lives. So his entire life he talked about how the P-38 saved me and my buddies." Evan Fagen said, "My dad and my brother and I believe we are here because of that. I think that got the itch started for my parents to get interested in WWII aviation."

Diane and Ron Fagen want to connect the Greatest Generation with the latest generation. With Perception Films of Minneapolis, MN they have created a documentary about "Twilight Tear" featuring WWII triple ace Bud Anderson and narrated by Gary Sinise,

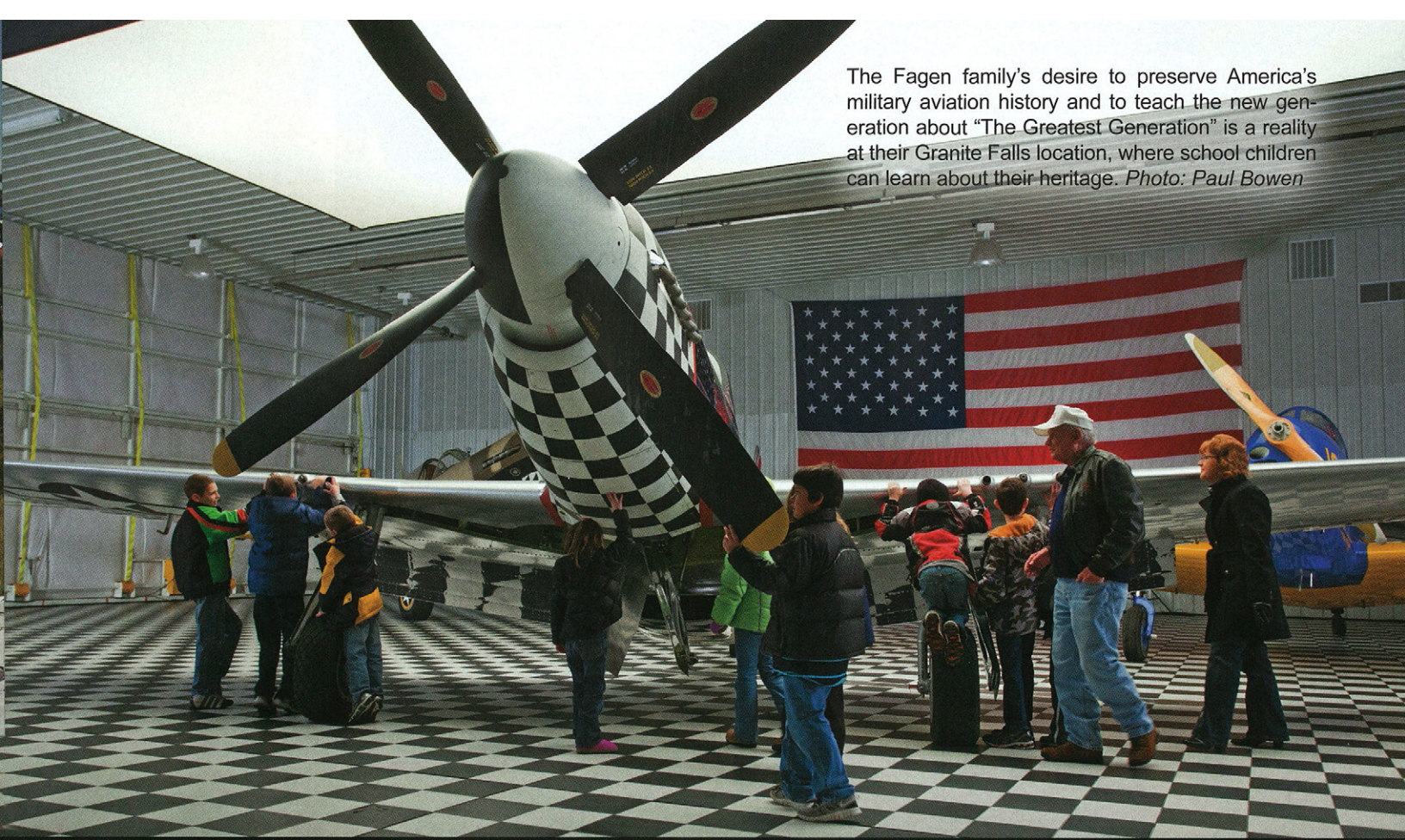
▲ (top-right) Just as he did on Fagen's P-38 *Ruff Stuff* in 2007, Stefan Hokuf concentrates on applying some very special nose art on the ramp at AirVenture 2011. Photo: Greg Morehead

▲ (middle-right) "Twilight Tear" ready for judging at EAA's 2011 AirVenture in Oshkosh, WI. Note the original stamps and stencils applied to the propeller blades, just as they were at North American Aviation's Englewood, CA factory when this plane was produced. Photo: Greg Morehead

◀ (middle-left) "Twilight Tear" jacked up for target practice with help from the Minnesota National Guard and local law enforcement. Mark Tisler takes aim. Photo: Bill Rammer

◀ (bottom-left) Note the real bullets streaking out of the guns towards the banner target in a fiery yellow stripe 75 yards away. Photo: Bill Rammer

The Fagen family's desire to preserve America's military aviation history and to teach the new generation about "The Greatest Generation" is a reality at their Granite Falls location, where school children can learn about their heritage. *Photo: Paul Bowen*



Ron Fagen flying "Twilight Tear" 67 years after Lt. Hubert "Bill" Davis flew it during World War Two. Davis earned three aerial victories against German aircraft. Photo: Xavier Meal



a 1994 Academy Award nominee for his role as Lt. Dan in the movie *Forrest Gump*. He has devoted countless hours towards veteran charities and non-profit organizations, additionally supporting the troops by visiting military bases both here and abroad with the Lt. Dan Band, the cover band he founded with Kimo Williams. Stay tuned for the announcement of that release. Additionally, Kevin Eldridge continues to fly Fagen Fighter's aircraft including the P-38, P-51 and P-40, made available for many of the United States Air Force Heritage

Flight Foundation demonstrations at airshows around the country. Look for them this year at the Thunder on the Lakeshore Airshow in Manitowoc, Wisconsin June 2-3rd with the F-16 Fighting Falcon and August 11-12th at the Milwaukee Air and Water Show with the F-22 Raptor.

Fagen Fighters also hosts the Ray Fagen Memorial Airshow—Planes 'n Songs, featuring a live performance by Aaron Tippin and his band to be held at Granite Falls Airport on June 16, 2012. Diane Fagen put the Fagen family's efforts into perspective, "This is a lot more than restoring a machine. It's bringing history to life. And if we're able to have young children walk up to touch an airplane such as "Twilight Tear" and interact with a member of the Greatest Generation, I think that's so much more important than just turning a page in a history book." All this enthusiasm has segued into the eagerly anticipated Fagen Fighters World War II Museum, expected to open its doors in conjunction with the airshow. The museum showcases a fantastic environment created to present the events of the past and have them leap forward into today. "The most important thing in my life right now, outside my family, is keeping that connection to WWII alive. Trying to teach people and remind them to never forget what happened in order to keep our freedom." Well said, Ron Fagen. ★

◀ (op-middle-left and bottom) A very special day was shared between aviation icon Bud Anderson and children at Bert Raney Elementary School. Anderson spoke with the children about what it was like to fly a P-51 Mustang during World War Two, and then the entire group went on a field trip to the Granite Falls Airport where the kids were able to see and touch the P-51 "Twilight Tear". The event was captured by Perspective Films of Minneapolis, MN for use in a soon to be released documentary. Photo: Paul Bowen

◀ (op-bottom-right) From left: Evan Fagen, Ron Fagen, Bud Anderson, and Diane Fagen. Photo: Paul Bowen

◀ (lower-left) Lt. Hubert "Bill" Davis named "Twilight Tear" after the famous racehorse of the same name. Photo: Paul Bowen