



ONE GOOD THING OFTEN LEADS TO ANOTHER



By Dean Corpman

Contributors: Dan Whipkey, member, Mustang Car Club of Omaha, and Captain Larry Lumpkin, pilot of P-51 Mustang, Gunfighter, and member, Great Plains Wing of the Commemorative Air Force.

June 2010, 55th Wing leaders from Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska, invited Mustang Car Club of Omaha (MCCO) members to display their Mustangs at the Offutt Air Force Base Open House and Air Show on August 28th and 29th of 2010. Offutt Air Force Base is located in eastern Nebraska adjacent to the town of Bellevue, Nebraska, which is within the Omaha metro area.

To be fair, 55th Wing leaders also invited another car club from the Omaha, Nebraska-Council Bluffs, Iowa metro area whose members favor a Brand X, 2-seat V8-powered automobile. Recognizing the good natured, but deep-seated, competition that exists between a Ford club and a Brand X car club, 55th Wing leaders wisely scheduled the Brand X club to display their cars on Saturday, August 28th.

Getting back to the story, after a couple of months of planning and coordination between MCCO members and the Offutt Air Show staff, early Sunday morning, August 29th, MCCO members mustered through a very thorough Air Force Security Forces screening process ... including getting their cars screened by military police dogs. Having passed the Air Force's security test in flying colors, MCCO members parked 20 Mustangs inside the airfield perimeter in the Offutt AFB on a glorious, nearly cloud free day.

The huge crowd attending the Open House and Air Show the remainder of that Sunday amazed MCCO members, several of whom had never before visited an Air Force Base. Even better, MCCO members were treated to day full of fantastic aerial demonstrations as well as many Air Force aircraft parked for public viewing. Some aircraft, like the Air Force's C-17 and C-130 cargo aircraft were open for visitors to walk through and even sit in the cockpits. Aerial demonstrations continued throughout the day and ranged from civilian stunt pilots flying modern, high-performance aerobatic aircraft, to the Air Force's "Thunderbirds" flying the Air Force's F-16 fighter aircraft, to an absolutely amazing demonstration of aircraft capability by the Air Force's newest frontline fighter, the F-22. Additionally, quite a number of vintage World War II aircraft also participated as either static display aircraft and some actually flew to demonstrate their wartime capabilities.

One of those aircraft in particular was a P-51 Mustang; named Gunfighter, flown by Captain Larry Lumpkin of a local Great Plains Wing of the Commemorative Air Force. During the Gunfighter World War II flying demonstration, the Offutt Air Show announcer mentioned that the Gunfighter made its home at the Council Bluffs Municipal airport near Council Bluffs, Iowa.

At that moment, a few MCCO members were lounging under the shade of a tent that the 55th Wing Air Show staff graciously provided MCCO members to cool their heels near their Mustangs and keep their eyes on the crowds admiring their cars. The announcement that the Gunfighter P-51 was close by, spurred the conversation to the idea of getting MCCO member's Mustangs photographed with their legendary World War II namesake.



One MCCO member, Dan Whipkey, didn't hesitate to convert "wishing" into "action." According to Dan, "while walking around the vintage aircraft on display at the Offutt Open House I approached the Gunfighter, a pristine P-51 Mustang. Larry Lumpkin, the Gunfighter's pilot, was standing near the plane and answering spectator's questions. I inquired about the possibility of MCCO members having a chance for their Mustangs to have photos taken with his Mustang. He looked at me most seriously and responded that this was a very expensive aircraft and the cost of such an opportunity would be prohibitive. He must have noticed my sense of excitement deflate for he quickly burst out in laughter and said, 'Just kidding! That's a great idea, and of course it won't cost anything!'

"Because of the busy day ahead of him, including a dogfight simulation flight, Larry suggested that I give him a call later in the week and we could arrange a time for the proposed photo shoot.

"When I called him, I quickly found out the Gunfighter is a very high-demand attraction at air shows around the country and it's down time is limited. However, working with Larry was effortless. Larry was exceptionally accommodating and cooperative in finding time for our photo shoot. We were able to arrange a date in early October that would work. Of course, the agreed upon time just happened to be a perfect autumn day and the experience could not have been better."

As Dan said, October 2nd, 2010, was a crisp, cool, and nearly

picture-perfect day with only a few puffy clouds in the sky. The turnout for the photo shoot was way beyond MCCO member expectations as 39 Mustangs rumbled into the Council Bluffs Municipal Airport and onto the aircraft parking ramp. The Mustangs that showed for the photo shoot covered the gamut from MCCO member and webmaster Duane Bartelt's fully-restored, 1964 1/2 Mustang (numbers-matching 260 cubic inch engine and 4-speed transmission, no less), across nearly every year and body style to brand-new 2010 Mustangs. More than a couple of non-MCCO Mustang drivers gained invites to the shoot and that was perfectly okay with the MCCO bunch. "The more the merrier:" Especially for unique opportunities such as this event.

A couple of MCCO members had their own high-quality camera gear and donated their time and considerable expertise for the photo shoot. In turn, each Mustang driver (sometime the driver and several friends and family members) parked their Mustangs in front of the Gunfighter to pose for pictures. Some chose to have just their car photographed with the plane, others expanded the photos to include family and their beloved Mustang. The shoot concluded with a series of group pictures.

Though Larry Lumpkin had made an off-hand offer to do the shoot for free, MCCO members researched Larry's busy flying schedule and learned of the very high cost of maintaining the Gunfighter. Thus, on the spot, MCCO leaders collected money from some very happy Mustang owners and presented

Larry and the Commemorative Air Force \$400.00 for graciously offering this rare and very-highly appreciated opportunity.

Larry Lumpkin graciously offered some background on himself, the Gunfighter, and the Great Plains Wing of the Commemorative Air Force for the benefit of other Mustang Clubs that may want to consider this opportunity.

Larry Lumpkin hails from Marvell, Arkansas, and currently lives in Elkhorn, Nebraska, now an annexed community in west Omaha, Nebraska. Larry is an airline pilot flying with United Airlines when he isn't flying the P-51 Gunfighter. His schedule with the P-51 includes flying as many as 10 air shows and weekends selling rides to help offset the costs of keeping this famous aircraft in the air.



SIDEBAR

The following excerpts, with minor typographical edits, were taken directly from the Great Plains Wing's web site at www.greatplainswing.org/p51.htm

The Gunfighter P-51 was designed by The North American Aviation Company in 1940, from specifications provided by the British Government. The first P-51 models (the A-36, the P-51 and the P-51A) were powered by Allison, non-supercharged engines. The subsequent models; the B, C, D, H and K, were powered by Rolls-Royce Merlin engines, or variants of that engine. The Packard Motor Car Company was licensed to build the Merlin engine in the United States to provide sufficient numbers of the engine as production of the P-51 increased. A combined total of over 15,000 Mustangs were produced, including all models. The Mustang was produced by North American in Inglewood, California, and in Dallas, Texas. The Mustang's top speed is 505 MPH, with a top cruising speed of 437 MPH (at 25,000 feet). The average fuel consumption is 60 gallons per hour at economy cruise. During WWII combat conditions, pilots confirmed speeds of 600 MPH in a vertical dive in pursuit of enemy aircraft and both the pilot and aircraft survived to fly and fight in future air battles. The P-51 originally cost the U.S. Government \$51,000. As late as 1959, they were sold at surplus auction for an average sales price of \$1,490. Today these aircraft are valued in excess of \$1,000,000, depending on aircraft condition.

This particular aircraft is a "D" model, serial number 44-73264, which was the most produced P-51 model during the War with over 8,000 built. Today, about 140 Mustangs exist, world-wide, in Museums, flying or under restoration. No country in the world any longer flies the Mustang as part of their inventory. The Dominican Republic was the last country to do so and sold these aircraft on the civilian market in 1985.

As mentioned, the Gunfighter's original designation was "44-73264" and was built in the North American plant in Inglewood, California and accepted into the USAAF in March 1945. That same month, it was trans-shipped to England, where it was assigned to the famous 'Mighty Eighth' Air Force. In July of the same year, after the War had ended in Europe, it was returned to the U.S. and assigned to Olmstead Field in Pennsylvania, where it remained until 1947. For the next nine years the aircraft served with four different states Air National Guard units in Wyoming, New Mexico, Illinois, and finally the Kentucky ANG, where in 1956, it was declared surplus and sold on the civilian market.

44-73264 is restored in the colors of the 343rd Fighter Squadron, 55th Fighter Group, 66th Fighter Wing, 8th Air Force, USAAF, using the nose art Gunfighter, providing the name by which the aircraft is widely known. The 55th Fighter Group was the first American Air Force unit to become operational in the Lockheed P-38 Lightning prior to transitioning into the P-51. On March 3, 1944, the 55th Fighter Group was the first USAAF combat unit to fly over Berlin and was one of the units to provide top cover over the Invasion Beaches at Normandy on "D-Day", June 6, 1944.

All armor plate and armament have been removed from Gunfighter and the average gross weight is approximately 7,500 lbs. The current maximum fuel capacity is 184 gallons. The engine is a twelve cylinder in a "V" configuration, rated at 1,490 HP and has a displacement of 1650 cubic inches. It is equipped with a supercharger which allows for a service ceiling of 41,000 feet.

The pilot duties for Gunfighter are split by Captain Larry Lumpkin, of Elkhorn, NE, Doug Rozendaal of Clear Lake, IA, Dr. Dave Peeler of Memphis, TN, and Captain Jeff Linebaugh of Collierville, TN.

The hourly estimated cost to "Keep it Flyin'" approaches \$1,600 per hour, which includes the cost of engine overhaul, parts, maintenance, insurance, hangar, fuel, oil, paint and all the other items necessary to safely operate the aircraft.