

# Betty Jane



**CHUG** . . . chug  
. . . vroom . . .  
. . . pop . . .  
pop . . . vroom . . . North American November-2-5-1-Mike-X-ray taking active runway 3-4 for immediate departure. Va-roommmmm . . . yippee! That was what my first takeoff in a P-51 sounded like.

The Collings Foundation has come through for me again and let me fly its TP-51C. This was an incredible experience. I loved every minute of it, and it left me wanting more.

On a cool fall afternoon I ventured to the Westminster, Maryland, airport to hang out with the Collings Foundation and its aircraft. This year it brought its B-17 *Nine-O-Nine*,

B-24 *Witchcraft*, B-25 *Tonde-layo*, and new for this year, the TP-51C *Betty Jane*.

The P-51C was a field modification that added a second seat so the aircraft could be used as a high-speed and VIP transport. According to the Collings Foundation website, one of the most famous P-51Cs was named *The Stars Look Down*, and it transported Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower over the beaches of Normandy so he could direct the invasion of Europe.

The Collings Foundation P-51C is painted as Col. Charles M. McCorkle's P-51,



# Flying the Collings Foundation TP-51C

BY BRIAN DEMAY



PAUL BOWEN  
BRIAN DEMAY



named Betty Jane, that he flew in as commander of the 31st Fighter Group, based in Algeria, Tunisia, and Italy. McCorkle had 11 confirmed kills, six of them in the P-51 Mustang.

This P-51C carries No. 42-103293 and was built in Dallas, Texas, by North American aircraft manufacturing. The aircraft had a complete restoration from 2000 to 2004 when it was rebuilt to the two-seat configuration with dual controls. Five TP-51Cs were built during World War II.

I met my certificated flight instructor, Jimmy Rollison, who would take the front seat and let me fly from the rear. Jimmy normally flies for a large package delivery company in MD-11s. Jimmy is a volunteer pilot flying the Collings Foundation B-24 on its national tour.

We met and discussed the flight; we would take off from Westminster and fly north toward Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. There we would find some open airspace to put the Mustang through its paces. We were planning on some aerobatics to demonstrate what the famous World War II pilots like Anderson, Yeager, and Blakeslee experienced during combat. The biggest advantage for me was that no one was shooting at or chasing me.

We strapped in, putting on the parachutes and going over bailout procedures. Then we put the seat straps on and closed the canopy.

This P-51C is a razorback model and does not have the bubble canopy the D model has. The canopy does not slide forward but opens in two pieces over the top and up from the left side. The cockpit looks like a World War II fighter, using the same instruments and having the updates as required by the FAA.

We went through the engine start-up and let the big

Liberty engine warm up before we taxied. After the taxi and run-up we took our position on the runway, lined it up straight, and I was on the controls with Jimmy as we took off. I removed the mike from my mouth so I could yell yippee, as it was the exciting takeoff I expected.

This Mustang is powered by a Packard Liberty 12-cylinder, 1,450-hp engine, a licensed copy of the famous Rolls-Royce Merlin.

This is the most powerful single-engine aircraft I have ever flown, and my 50 hours of tailwheel time did not prepare me for the Mustang. The high horsepower and big prop created a lot of torque and P-factor using a lot of right rudder on takeoff.

Right after takeoff, Jimmy handed me the controls. I flew a pattern and flyby down the active runway, and then I pulled back and set the power for climb. We were climbing to 5,000 feet around the clouds, heading for open airspace away from airways and the dreaded D.C. air defense identification zone. We contacted Harrisburg Approach and were given clearance for a 5-mile chunk of airspace just inside its control. The Harrisburg controllers were very helpful.

This was a great day for flying, and we would need to keep our eyes open for other traffic. On the way up to our practice area, we saw several gliders, Skyhawks, and a Mooney. Harrisburg Approach said it would advise us of visual flight rules traffic. During the flight we did not hear from Harrisburg and did not see any other aircraft until our return to Westminster.

Next we did our clearing turns, and Jimmy would demonstrate the maneuver and I would follow doing the same.

We performed rolls to both the left and right, loops, barrel rolls, Cuban-eights, and split-S maneuvers.

While we were doing some maneuvers I asked Jimmy to do





PAUL BOWEN

them a second time so I could take a few pictures. I figured this was a once-in-a-lifetime flight and I better make the most of it.

As we performed the first roll, I could feel my body being pressed back into the seat and feel the *g*-forces as the plane turned in the sky, performing an aerial dance. I was surprised at how effortlessly the maneuvers seemed to be. I have heard stories about how unforgiving the Mustang could be if you take it outside the envelope and was careful not to venture there.

Next we flew the loop and barrel roll. I could see the sky turn white as I passed in front of the clouds, then turn blue again with the sky. The bright sun shined in my eyes for just a moment as I pulled the stick back, and then the ground showed up before turning blue as I leveled out.

The Cuban-eight and split-S maneuvers were the most fun and exciting. I was finally getting the handle of the advanced maneuvers and really starting to enjoy it.


As I flew these simulated combat maneuvers I could imagine the German Me 109 or Fw 190 chasing me through the sky. I imagined turning and twisting to get away from the massive firepower these fighters wielded. After completing a few maneuvers and quickly changing from the hunted to the hunter, my attention was drawn forward, as I had a Jerry in my sights. I squeezed the stick, pulling the gun switch and feeling the plane shutter from firing the guns. Pow, a flash of fire and black smoke came from Jerry's aircraft as I watched it spin to the ground.

My dream was awakened as Jimmy spoke up and told me it was time to head for home. I had used up my hour, and we needed to get back to the airport so Jimmy could take the evening B-24 flight.

I turned *Betty Jane* toward Westminster. The late evening sun was starting to turn the clouds pink as we weaved our way back down and toward the aerodrome. We entered the pattern on the 45 and flew a pattern to the overhead break, flying over the static display aircraft to give the folks on the ground a show.

Jimmy deployed the flaps and landing gear, letting me stay on the controls as we landed. The landing was smooth as we touched down on the mains and then the tail wheel.

We slowed down and taxied back.

Jimmy shut down the engine, and we opened the canopy. I sat there for a few minutes relishing my flight and reflecting on the stories I have read about the great aces flying the P-51. Flying the Mustang was everything I had heard about it. The plane was docile, easy to fly, and light on the controls. The plane was a joy to fly. 



PAUL BOWEN