

**THE U.S. AIR FORCE
F-82 TWIN MUSTANG
AND THE FATE OF 46-497**





North American XP-82 Twin Mustang Prototype, 1945

The Twin Mustang was manufactured by North American Aviation of Los Angeles, California and originally designated the P-82. It was the last propeller-driven, piston engine aircraft produced for the U.S. military. Toward the end of World War II, the Army Air Force identified the need for a very long-range, all-weather escort fighter to support the planned invasion of Japan. Aircraft design began in 1943 with the first test flight of the XP-82 occurring in June 1945. Two months later after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan surrendered. Production slowed as the initial threat posed by the Imperial Japanese Armed Forces was neutralized and, by 1947, it became clear that the United States was likely to enter into hostilities with its former ally, the Soviet Union. While the U.S. perfected the use of then-experimental jet aircraft, the P-82 went into full production to replace the war-weary P-61 Black Widow as an all-weather night fighter to defend the American coastline in the event of nuclear attack by Soviet bombers. The U.S. Air Force was created in 1947 and assumed responsibility for most aviation missions previously handled by the U.S. Army Air Force. At this time aircraft designations were re-formulated, with the Twin Mustang being classified as an F-82, with “F” for “fighter” instead of “P” for “pursuit.”



The XP-82, a prototype of the F-82 Twin Mustang long range interceptor in flight.





**NONSTOP FROM
HAWAII TO NEW YORK
IN FOURTEEN AND A HALF HOURS
ON 1,816 GALLONS OF FUEL.**

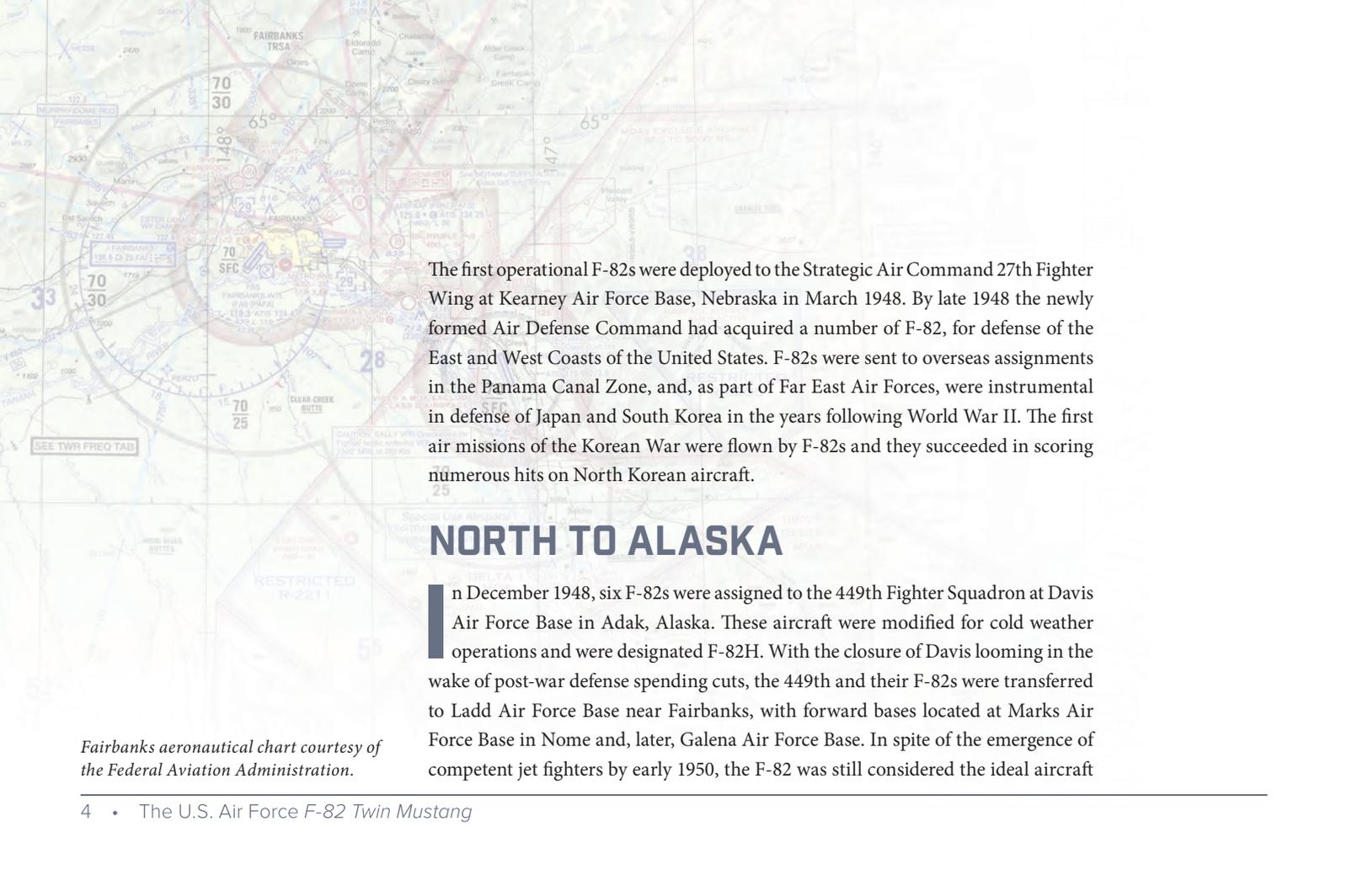


The first F-82F delivered to the Air Defense Command.

Although its name implies that it was little more than two P-51 Mustang aircraft melded together, the P-82 Twin Mustang was in fact an all new design. More than 15,000 P/F-51 units were produced by North American Aviation, a division of General Motors, making it one of the most popular and successful aircraft used during World War II. The concept was to combine two of these aircraft to increase range and payload capacity. In the end, however, only 20 percent of the Twin Mustang's parts were interchangeable with the P-51. Most Twin Mustangs utilized one cockpit for a radar observer, with full radar instrumentation. Early production models furnished each cockpit with identical controls capable of full control of the aircraft. This allowed the crew to switch off pilot duty, thereby enabling the aircraft to be safely operated to the full extent of its long-range capabilities. To this day, an F-82 holds the record for longest nonstop flight by a propeller driven fighter, having flown nonstop from Hawaii to New York in fourteen and a half hours on 1,816 gallons of fuel in 1947. The Twin Mustang was also an immensely versatile aircraft. North American Design Chief Edgar Schmued designed a system for carrying separate pod mounted on the center wing between the two fuselages which could carry additional guns, bombs, radar, an extra fuel tank, or weather observation equipment.



North American P-51 Mustangs



The first operational F-82s were deployed to the Strategic Air Command 27th Fighter Wing at Kearney Air Force Base, Nebraska in March 1948. By late 1948 the newly formed Air Defense Command had acquired a number of F-82, for defense of the East and West Coasts of the United States. F-82s were sent to overseas assignments in the Panama Canal Zone, and, as part of Far East Air Forces, were instrumental in defense of Japan and South Korea in the years following World War II. The first air missions of the Korean War were flown by F-82s and they succeeded in scoring numerous hits on North Korean aircraft.

NORTH TO ALASKA

In December 1948, six F-82s were assigned to the 449th Fighter Squadron at Davis Air Force Base in Adak, Alaska. These aircraft were modified for cold weather operations and were designated F-82H. With the closure of Davis looming in the wake of post-war defense spending cuts, the 449th and their F-82s were transferred to Ladd Air Force Base near Fairbanks, with forward bases located at Marks Air Force Base in Nome and, later, Galena Air Force Base. In spite of the emergence of competent jet fighters by early 1950, the F-82 was still considered the ideal aircraft

Fairbanks aeronautical chart courtesy of the Federal Aviation Administration.



Above: 68th Fighter-All Weather Squadron North American F-82G Twin Mustang 46-372 having engine maintenance at a forward base in South Korea, 1951. Left: 27th FW North American F-82E Twin Mustangs, along with a Boeing B-29 Superfortress at Kearney Air Force Base, Nebraska.



F-82H at Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska Territory 1953.

for conditions in Alaska. As they were replaced by jet-powered aircraft elsewhere in the world, all serviceable F-82s were shipped north for Alaska service. Once converted to F-82H configuration and retrofitted with radar for use as a night interceptor, their design as an all-weather fighter made them well-suited for operation during the cold, dark Arctic winters. Their long-range capabilities were unmatched at the time by jet aircraft. Aerial refueling was not yet standard practice and this was vital given the long Siberian coastline they reconnoitered and the great distances that they would patrol between airfields in the remote Alaska wilderness. They were designed with ground combat capabilities, essential for engaging enemy targets in the untouched Alaska wilderness where it could be very difficult, if not impossible, to quickly deploy large numbers of ground troops to locations off the road system.

F-82s served at what was then Ladd Air Force Base from March 1949 until their final retirement in 1953, with the last F-82H flying its final mission for mothballing at Elmendorf Air Force Base in November of that year. During that time F-82 crews flew countless missions patrolling the skies of Alaska, serving as a simulated invasion force for training exercises, and mitigating flooded springtime rivers



*The last flight crew and ground support personnel for the F-82F Twin Mustang 46-415, Ladd AFB, 1953. **Background:** F-82 in front of Hangar 2, Ladd Air Force Base.*



F-82H in the hangar, Ladd Air Force Base.

by bombing ice jams which threatened to inundate local communities. During its five years of service in Alaska, five major incidents involving F-82s were reported. None involved loss of the pilots except for the crash of tail number 46-497.

THE FATE OF 46-497

Aircraft 46-497 with a crew of two took off from Ladd Field on January 16, 1950 on a local training mission in the company of two other F-82s. At approximately 1335 hours, while practicing maneuvers, 46-497 suddenly entered a steep descending spiral and crashed to the ground, ten miles south of Fairbanks in the Tanana Flats Training Area. The other pilots immediately alerted the tower and rescue crews were dispatched to the remote location of the wreckage that could only be reached by helicopter. Crews were not initially able to approach the downed aircraft due to intense fire, but rescuers observed that the crew must have been killed instantly. The crews' bodies were recovered shortly after the incident, but investigators were unable to reach the crash location for two days by which time a snowstorm had covered the site with several inches of snow. Military officials decided to return in the spring for further examination of the wreckage, but today no evidence



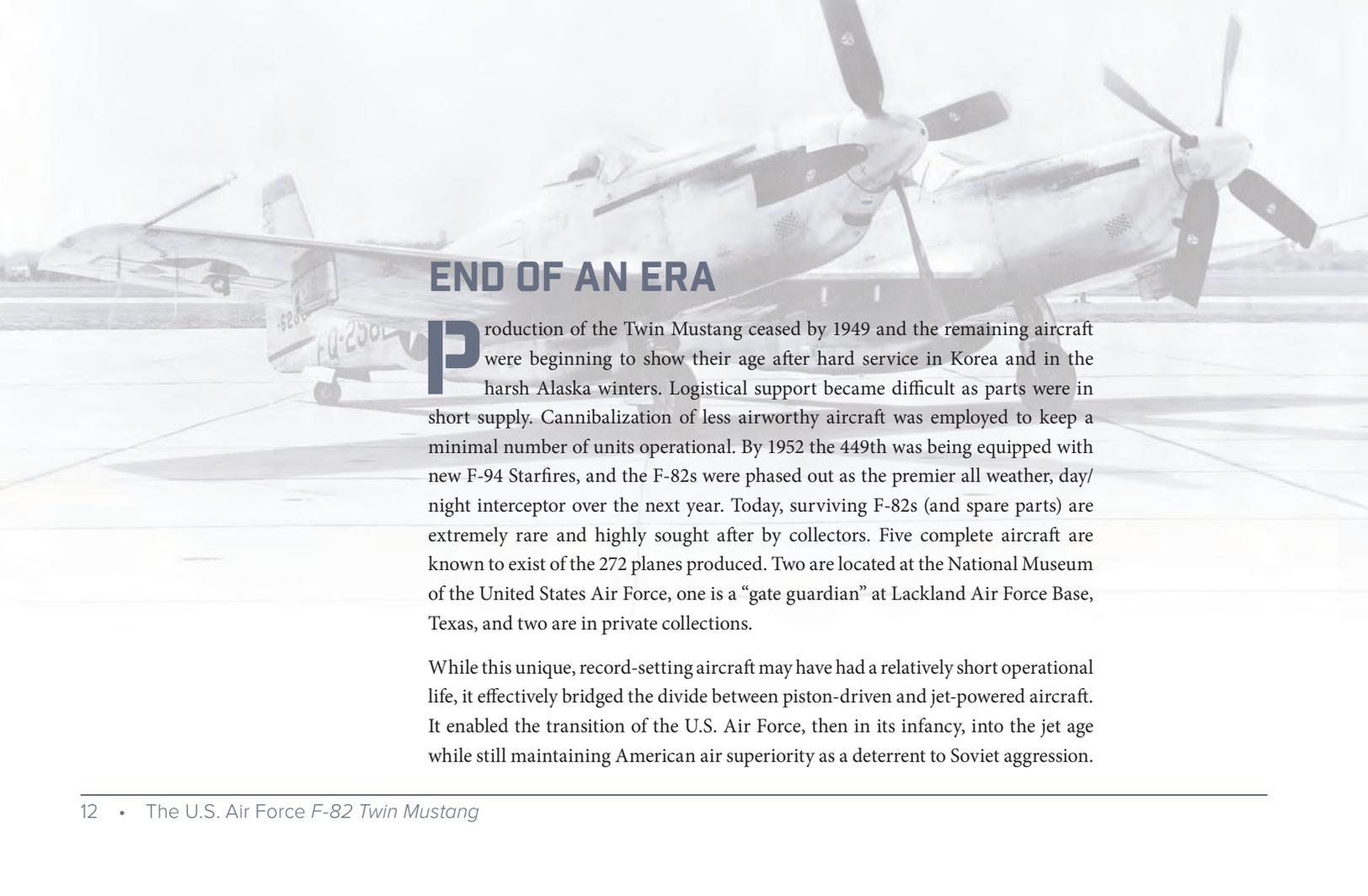
Wreckage from the crash of F-82 46-497. Photos courtesy of Elizabeth Cook, 2015.

can be found that any subsequent investigation was ever carried out. While it was speculated that failure of the aileron boost motor, a known issue with the F-82s, may have led to this crash, the exact cause was officially deemed “impossible to determine.”

The two crewmen killed when 46-497 went down were both seasoned aviators and veterans of World War II. The pilot, First Lieutenant Charles W. Neely, 27, from Charleroi, Pennsylvania had enlisted in the Army Air Force in 1943. He entered flight school, quickly earned his wings, and found himself flying in the European theater by 1944. On September 8, 1944 he was shot down while flying a P-47 Thunderbolt over Belfort, France. He was captured by Nazi forces and spent the rest of the war in a POW camp. First Lieutenant Neely continued flying post-war with the U.S. Air Force. Following the fatal crash of 46-497, his body was returned to his hometown for burial. First Lieutenant Milton E. Maxson, 24, of Sidney, New York was operating as radar observer on the flight. He also enlisted in the Army Air Force and became a pilot, flying wartime missions in the Pacific Theater. He took radar training after the war and was shipped to Alaska as a radar technician and instructor in 1949. First Lieutenant Maxson was also buried in his hometown. He left behind a wife, Wanda, and son, Mark Alan.



North American F-82B left cockpit at the National Museum of the United States Air Force. (U.S. Air Force photo)



END OF AN ERA

Production of the Twin Mustang ceased by 1949 and the remaining aircraft were beginning to show their age after hard service in Korea and in the harsh Alaska winters. Logistical support became difficult as parts were in short supply. Cannibalization of less airworthy aircraft was employed to keep a minimal number of units operational. By 1952 the 449th was being equipped with new F-94 Starfires, and the F-82s were phased out as the premier all weather, day/night interceptor over the next year. Today, surviving F-82s (and spare parts) are extremely rare and highly sought after by collectors. Five complete aircraft are known to exist of the 272 planes produced. Two are located at the National Museum of the United States Air Force, one is a “gate guardian” at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, and two are in private collections.

While this unique, record-setting aircraft may have had a relatively short operational life, it effectively bridged the divide between piston-driven and jet-powered aircraft. It enabled the transition of the U.S. Air Force, then in its infancy, into the jet age while still maintaining American air superiority as a deterrent to Soviet aggression.



F-82Hs and an F-82G at Ladd AFB, 1952.

PROTECTING OUR CULTURAL RESOURCES

This publication was created as mitigation for the protection of cultural resources on Army-managed lands in Alaska and funded through penalties collected from the illegal collection of aircraft parts from Federal lands. Federal agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management and the United States Army are mandated to protect the cultural resources under their stewardship. This mission is not only in compliance with Federal law, but also in consideration of our collective history.

Cultural resources are non-renewable. Theft or vandalism of those resources on Federal lands may result in criminal and civil penalties, fines and/or imprisonment. Additionally, destruction of these resources denies future generations the enjoyment of and knowledge from those resources that illustrate our heritage.

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CULTURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AT FORT WAINWRIGHT

The Fort Wainwright Cultural Resources Management section supports the Army's mission by identifying, inventorying, and managing cultural resources in a manner that complies with federal law, minimizes impacts on the mission, supports sustainability of resources, and provides sound stewardship of properties eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

The section is located within the Environmental Division, Building 3023. Copies of our publications and additional information on the history of Fort Wainwright are available during business hours, Monday through Friday 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. or on the website at www.wainwright.army.mil/env/CR.html.

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