



June 5, 2015 - AirCorps Aviation in Bemidji, Minnesota, confirmed this week that the P-51 *Sierra Sue II* will be among the slate of warbirds appearing at EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2015. The airplane, which underwent a three-year restoration completed in 2014, was brought back to factory-fresh condition – “as she would look on the flightline in Belgium just after her nose art was painted,” noted AirCorps’ Chuck Cravens.

P-51s produced by North American’s Inglewood and Dallas factories were not flawless;

Production was rapid and mill-finish metal, paint, zinc chromate imperfections, and other blemishes happened to every Mustang that rolled off the line, including BuNo 44-63675. In addition, wartime nose art wasn’t always up to museum standards or the airbrushed beauty displayed on many beautiful warbirds today.

Cravens said the AirCorps’ craftsmen discovered that efforts to recreate that authentic “imperfection” were at least as challenging as creating a standard showpiece warbird.

*Sierra Sue II*’s interesting history began with its delivery to the United States Army Air Forces on November 27, 1944. The Mustang was shipped overseas on January 29, 1945, destined for Y-32 Ophoven, near Zwartburg, Belgium, the first week of April.

She was issued to 1st Lt. Robert Bohna of the Ninth Air Force, 370th Fighter Group, 402nd Squadron, on April 11, 1945. *Sierra Sue II* was flown in combat for the duration of the war, supporting the crossing of the Rhine and the push further into Germany until the Allied command ordered a halt at the Elbe. After that

the plane was used as an escort to medium and heavy bomber missions until the last WWII mission on April 25, 1945.

Later in life, *Sierra Sue II* served in the Swedish and Nicaraguan air forces before being sold into private hands in 1971. Dave Allender, of Hayward, California, worked on modifications in a quest to break a low altitude closed course speed record, but the attempt was never made. Dr. Roger Christgau, a Minnesota physician, acquired BuNo 44-63675 in 1977 and owned it for 34 years until 2011.

It was sold to Paul Ehlen, who had the restoration done at AirCorps. *Sierra Sue II* is currently on loan to the Wings of the North Museum, Eden Prairie, Minnesota. Cravens says the airplane is one of the most original Mustangs in existence.

“She’s never had a back seat, her World War II tube radios are functional, her restorers took great pains to acquire (or duplicate where necessary) 1940s rivets, bolts, wiring, and countless other details,” he said.

Cravens just finished a new book tracing the history of the airplane titled, *Combat Vet P-51, the History of Sierra Sue II, World War Two Survivor*. Copies will be available at Oshkosh this year.