

Major Ted (Tadeusz) Skowronek

U.S. Army Air Corp

345 Fighter Group/Pioneer Mustangs &
355 Fighter Squadron Pugnacious Pups



Major Ted (Tadeusz) Skowronek
United States Air Force
354th Fighter Group (Pioneer Mustangs)
355th Fighter Squadron (Pugnacious Pups)

Ted was assigned to the 354th Fighter Group upon his arrival in England as a freshly train pilot and on the 4th of July 1944, was flown to a portable airfield designated "A2" near St. Lo France (one month after D-day) to begin his career as a fighter pilot. That day had been chosen as the day for a secret mission to fly Gen. Eisenhower over enemy territory and the 354th was selected for the mission. Ted stood 10 feet from the General on the airstrip and thought to himself, "That guy really looks confident, I am sure this adventure is going to turn out well." (see www.354th.com and www.354fg.com for more information on the 354th).

The 354th was part of the 9th Air Force and the first to receive the P51 Mustang (the Pioneer Mustang's). Ted's Squadron was the 355th. His was a

unit that followed the troops as the battle front moved. Typically their tents and mobile airfield were about 10 miles from the front lines. His unit's flying missions alternated between Ground Support and Bomber Escort. The 355th used P47 for Ground Support and Airdrome Strafing and chose the P51 for Bomber Escort because of its longer range and excellent dog fight maneuverability.

On Ted's 17th mission (a massive Fighter Sweep on August 12, 1944), he had pulled out of a dive after downing a FW190 and a deafening explosion opened a large hole in his left wing from its underside. With damaged coolant lines the P51's engine was overheating and Ted was losing altitude. After landing wheels-up in a ploughed field, Ted headed for the woods and ultimately found the French Underground who hid him in the home of the deu Marque family and their two lovely daughters, Jacquelyn and Janette, near Fere Faiallel, France. (90 km NE of Paris). German soldiers were billeted on the first floor of the home. Two weeks later Ted was liberated as Patton's army recaptured the town.

Ted returned to the 355th and flew 105 combat missions before being shipped stateside. Ted flew in the Battle of the Bulge, Ramagen Bridge, Houflize, as well as many others. Ted's personal decorations include the Air Medal with 13 clusters, the Distinguished Flying Cross, Purple Heart, and 7 other service ribbons. Ted downed 2 ME109 and 1.5 FW190 aircraft. (Shared with his wingman)

Back in the USA Ted was assigned to the new Test Pilot School at Wright Field (OH). Ted joined the 2nd class to be formed and found himself in the class with many of the air combat heroes and ACES of WWII. His pilot skills were used to develop Low Visibility Onboard Aircraft Approach equipment (B17) and Ejection Seat development for jet aircraft (P80). He did skywriting and has tales of famous pilots that are best left to verbal telling.

Ted's flight logs show he flew 23 aircraft, including the Mustang, Thunderbolt, King Cobra, Warhawk, Twin Mustang, Lightning, Shooting

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Star, and Superfortress. He clocked in a total of 1056 flight hours.

Submitted By: Paul Cornell

Ted's personal story follows:

“My Favorite P-51 Story: Me and My Mustang, Always Ready for Adventure”

I arrived at my first combat duty airfield on July 4, 1944, one month after D-Day. The mobile combat airfield (the runway was interlocked metal panels laid down on a farmer's field) was designated A-2 and was located near St. Lo, France, near the D-Day landing beaches of Normandy. Combat pilots lived 4 men to a tent and I quickly settled into the daily flying routine of 3 to 4 days of flying duty and one day off.

It was chilly and dark when I was awakened at about 4 A.M. the morning of August 25, 1944 for my 22nd combat mission. I was not scheduled to fly that day but the assigned pilot could not make the mission and I was chosen to take his place. The mission for us that day was a Fighter Sweep of the German occupied Paris area. The rest of the Squadron were already taking off as I ran to the latrine, then grabbed a cold pancake and raced to the plane assigned to me: a P-51-B-10, tail #42-106445, Squadron Markings GQ-Q. We would start the mission together but only one of us would return.

After taking off, I played “catch up” with the squadron. I finally caught them and was assigned the Wingman slot to the Element Leader. As we approached the mission point, my Element Leader aborted, leaving me alone for the upcoming flight. Someone called in the “BOGIES” and the battle was on and I was on my own. I tried to stay with the balance of my flight but they were pulling away from me in the melee of the battle.

An FW-190 flew past me and I pursued it with both of us climbing towards the clouds. I fired my 6 50 cal. Guns and saw strikes to the FW-190.

He drove for lower clouds with me still firing and I could see my strikes hit him. He jettisoned his canopy, flew into my fire a last time and spun to the ground. While on my back I was hit by flack in my left wing that flipped me into a dive. As the ground came up at me I prepared to bail out, pulling back my canopy and releasing my seat belt. This was it. I was bailing out over German controlled France.

In a last desperate attempt to stay with the aircraft I pulled back on the stick and it responded and it pulled out of the crash dive. I closed my canopy, fastened my seatbelt, and turned to a southwest heading which would take me to the closest point of the Allied front line. I radioed my flight and told them of my trouble and my plan and got back a “Good Luck”!

Me and the GQ-Q were saved from crashing but we were not back to our lines yet. My Mustang gave me all the power it had but after a short time it started losing altitude and the engine temperature gauge showed it was seriously overheating. I was not able to turn the prop pitch down and the propeller was running wild. We were flying over a large, dense green forest when a single brown plowed field appeared. I headed for it and brought us in “wheels-up”. The landing was perhaps the most perfect one I ever made. I was certainly highly motivated to get it “right” and my P-51 flight controls were responsive and willing to the very end. I climbed over the side and threw 2 incendiary grenades into the cockpit, placed my chute on the wing, and ran toward the nearest trees because I heard dogs barking in the distance.

Thanks to the ultimate sacrifice of my P-51, the assistance of the Free French partisans, some disinterested German sentries, and Patton's army, I escaped and evaded for two weeks and was able to return to my unit on September 13, 1944. I flew a total of 121 sorties with the 354th. I went on to fly many more hours in the Mustang (total of 233).

As a member of the Air Force's 2nd Test Pilot class after the war, I was fortunate enough to

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fly 23 planes in the Air Force inventory (from X aircraft to the B29 to the P80). Most of the other planes I flew did their intended jobs well.

The best plane I ever flew was the North American P-51 Mustang marked GQ-Q because it gave me a superior weapon in battle and it gave me all it had to get me home.

After being liberated, there was a parade and a celebration in a town close to where the GQ-Q landed. I got hold of a camera and took a picture, a copy of which I have enclosed.

The P-51 was a formidable warrior and a beautiful plane to fly.

(P.S. A note on the Evasion adventure my P-51 got me into.)

After evading the dogs, I heard (after the wheels-up landing) by tramping through a swamp in the French forest. I stopped long enough to take inventory of what I had to work with. The only thing I had was the standard issue “Survival Kit” I had found in the P-51. I had left my .45 Colt side arm in my locker. I was wearing only a kaki shirt and pants as in my rush, I had not pulled on my flight suit or put on my flight jacket. I also discovered blood seeping through the left side of my trousers and found shrapnel in my left leg. I wanted to put as much distance as I could between me and the plane so I took a SW heading from the compass in the Kit and kept moving as fast as I could as the afternoon began to dim.

I still have the maps and compass from that kit but the story of my evasion adventure is for another time.