

1945 January 27-February 2

Corvette of the Sky

Allen, Mustang Pilot, Tells About Getting 2 Nazi Planes

AN 8TH AIR FORCE FIGHTER STATION, England—(Special) — First Lieut. Robert K. Allen, of La Crosse, Wis., P-51 Mustang pilot in the 364th Fighter Group, shot down two Messerschmitt - 109's, shared in the destruction of another and damaged a Focke Wulf-190 in aerial action near Koblenz in western Germany recently.

"I closed in rapidly on a lone Me-109 that I had spotted and shot strikes into his tail and wing roots," he reported. "Black smoke trailed from the enemy plane after a small explosion and the pilot bailed out. Then I noticed a big formation of FW-190's headed the other way. Before I could get my sights on a rear aircraft, another Nazi started shooting at me and the first one turned into me. I hit the latter a few times on the tail but had to break away to evade the other's fire."

Later, Lieut. Allen saw four Me-109's at a low level with four pursuing P-51's about half a mile behind. "I peeled off after the fourth Jerry and opened fire, scoring hits all over the enemy," he said. "Smoking badly, he bounced once on the ground and then 'bellied in.' I moved in right behind the next Me-109 and gave him a volley that brought oil from the Nazi craft, covering most of my canopy. My wing man finished him off."

Lieut. Allen wears the air medal with an oak leaf cluster. Formerly engaged in the welding trade with

his father at 316 South Third street, he entered the army air force in February, 1942, and won his wings at Stockton Field, Calif., on Oct. 30, 1942. The 24-year-old pilot graduated from La Crosse Central high school in 1938. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Kester W. Allen; 1245 South 11th street.

La Crosse Tribune, January 28, 1945, page 9

This article about a 24-year-old fighter pilot, Robert K. Allen, of La Crosse, was just one episode in a years-long battle for air superiority in World War II.

Ever since airplanes have been used in warfare, achieving air superiority has been an important strategic objective. Being able to attack the other side's troops, emplacements, transportation, communications, and manufacturing from the air without major interference is a distinct advantage.

Early in the European Theater, the bombing offensive against Germany was a key component of the overall strategy to degrade the German military and its industrial support. Air commanders believed that bombers striking both in the day and night could shorten the war.

The early Allied fighter planes, including the American P-38 Lightning and P-47 Thunderbolt,¹ were fine aircraft, but they lacked the range to escort bombers all the way to targets in Germany. As soon as they had to turn back, German aircraft, operating from airfields in occupied countries and Germany, pounced on the bomber formations.

The belief that bombers armed with multiple machineguns flying in formation could power their way through opposition without fighter escort proved to be fatal for many aircrews. German aircraft made the bombers run a gauntlet of attacks to and from their targets. They would attack at the edges of the formation and also speed through the middle of it trying to break it up. On the flight back to England, German fighters were like a pack of wolves picking off stragglers and damaged bombers. German fighters, along with anti-aircraft fire from the ground, caused heavy and sometimes staggering losses.

The North American P-51 Mustang fighter plane helped turn the tide of the air war with its speed, range, and maneuverability. Early versions became operational in December 1943. In later versions with an upgraded engine, the top speed of the Mustang was 440 miles per hour. With detachable auxiliary fuel tanks, it had a range of 950 miles. In early 1944, P-51D Mustangs were escorting bombing raids all the way to Berlin and back.² Mustangs were also used to attack troops, facilities, and transportation on the ground.

Late in 1944, the Germans started flying the first operational jet fighter, the ME-262, which was then the fastest aircraft in the world.³ This could have shifted the balance back to the Germans, but their jets were too few and too late.

The P-51 Mustang was also used in the Pacific Theater as an escort for B-29 bombing raids against Japan.

Fighter planes were the sports cars of the air forces, and the Mustang was the Corvette. Robert Allen was just one of several men from La Crosse County who were P-51 Mustang pilots during World War II. Lt. Frank B. Davy of La Crosse was shot down while on a mission in a P-51 and became a prisoner of war in early January 1945.⁴ Lt. Robert E. Carr of La Crosse shot down a German plane in his very first mission with a P-51 Mustang.⁵

Robert Allen had enlisted in the Army Air Corps⁶ in 1942. Based in England, he flew 61 combat missions and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.⁷

After the war, he earned a degree in engineering from the University of Wisconsin and worked for General Electric for 33 years. He and his wife, Joan, had 10 children. Robert K. Allen, the young La Crosse welder who helped the Allies win air superiority in the war with Germany, died in 2002 at the age of 81.⁸



North American P-51D Mustang
(Warbird Heritage Foundation)



Messerschmitt Bf 109
(Flying Heritage and Combat Armor Museum)



Focke-Wulf Fw 190
(Flying Heritage and Combat Armor Museum)

Jeff Rand
Adult Services Librarian
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Sources & Notes:

¹ The "P" designation stood for "Pursuit" aircraft that were designed to attack other aircraft. After World War II, the designation changed to "F" for fighter (F-4, F-14, F-15, F-16). "B" denoted bombers, such as the B-17, B-24, and B-25. "C" was for cargo aircraft that carried supplies and soldiers, such as the C-130.

² Andrew W. Waters, *The U.S. Air Force Airplanes, 1907-1983* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1983), 263.

³ Enzo Angelucci, *The Rand McNally Encyclopedia of Military Aircraft 1914-1980* (New York: The Military Press, 1983), 238-239.

⁴ "Report Davy is Prisoner," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, January 7, 1945, page 1.

⁵ "Carr Awarded Flying Medal," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, January 25, 1945, page 9.

⁶ During World War II, the air force was part of the United States Army. It did not become a separate branch of the armed forces until the late 1940s.

⁷ Robert K. Allen obituary, *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, April 9, 2002, page D-3.

⁸ *La Crosse Tribune*, April 9, 2002.

For more information on the P-51 Mustang, see:

<https://flyingheritage.org/Explore/The-Collection/United-States/North-American-P-51D-Mustang.aspx>

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/visit/museum-campus/us-freedom-pavilion/warbirds/north-american-p-51-mustang>

https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2218&context=gradschool_theses

<https://airandspace.si.edu/collection-objects/north-american-p-51d-30-na-mustang>

<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1985-06-09-me-9935-story.html>

<https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1019543.pdf>

<https://www.airforcemag.com/article/targeting-the-luftwaffe/>