



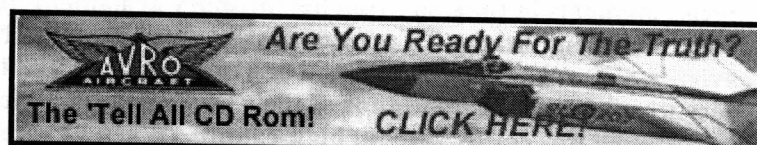
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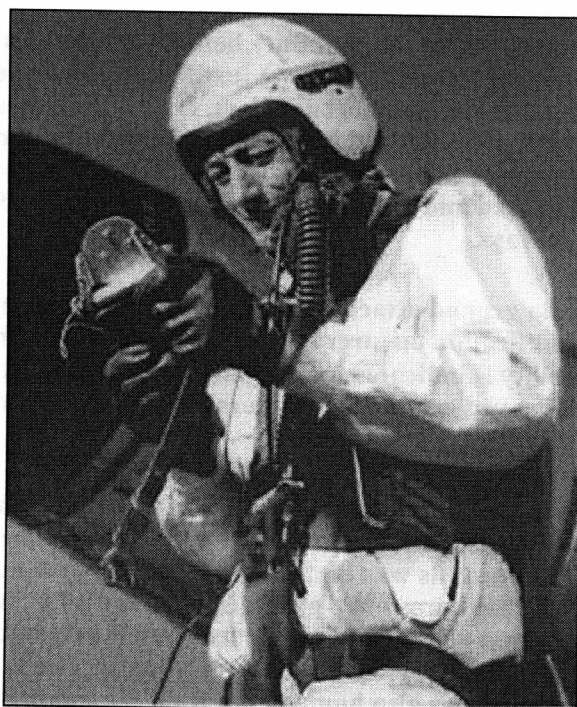
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Peter Cope



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Peter Roland Cope was born in Croyd England on December 7, 1921, and thus share birthday that with the date that now lives in its being the day of the Pearl Harbour attack. As a boy, he developed an intense interest in aviation. Croydon was then the location of London's main airport. At a young age he became determined to pursue a career in the Royal Air Force, hopefully as a pilot, after completing college.

The fact of Britain being at war with the Axis as of September, 1939 forced a change in his career path. He enlisted in the RAF and, due to the pressures on pilot training in the UK, exacerbated by the Battle of Britain, was sent to the United States for pilot training in 1941. As such, Cope learned to fly with the U.S. Army Air Corps in the American Deep South. After successful training at Craig Field, Alabama, he was bestowed with coveted silver wings of a USAAC pilot on May 16, 1942. Thus his RAF battle dress perhaps became an intimate symbol of the new wartime alliance between the United States and Britain. He flew North American P-51s, Tempests, de Havilland Mosquitos and other types during WW II and went through the Empire Test Pilot School in Britain. After returning to England and completing advanced fighter training, he was posted to 170 Sqn., RAF

undertook operations on another symbol of allied cooperation; the P-51A Mustang, designed and built in the States for Britain's express (and immediate) needs, over a 143 day period by North American Aviation.

Peter flew low level combat reconnaissance missions in the fabled Mustang, as Flight Lieutenant and Acting Squadron Leader, photographing all kinds of targets in Hitler's *Festung Europa*, or Fortress Europe. The early Mustang 1s (or P-51As) being powered by the non-supercharged American Allison engine, this series only allowed the Mustang to show its high-speed potential at low level, before receiving the US license-produced engine in Britain's top fighters and bombers, the Rolls Royce Merlin. The aircraft Peter flew initially had four .50 calibre machine guns, an armament that seemed very potent in its effects compared with the early British Spitfires. It certainly seemed dramatic in effect to a 20 year old bearing down on trains and other military targets in France and the Low Countries at near record speeds—often below treetop height, while attempting to bring guns to bear. This represented the secondary aspect of his duties, his primary responsibilities included flying at extremely low-level, often under very low cloud ceilings in dubious weather, to arrive at a very specific destination at precise moments in time, to bring his 'primary armament' (consisting of oblique and look-down cameras) to the proper angle and height. To provide crystal clear photos of Nazi installations and formations these fighting photographers faced the added demand of handling the aircraft very smoothly, at the time that the enemy was concentrating any available guns of their own what amounted to Britain's belligerent spying eye. Cope's reconnaissance photography was consistently of high-calibre. When he received a new Mustang with armament of considerable calibre than the A model carried (four 20mm cannon vs. six .50 cal.), he has related experiencing a somewhat different effect when brought accurately to bear. Returning from a photo assignment one day a train came into view and Peter and he gave the engine a long blast of cannon fire. The very next day he was returning again on the same train and saw the train was where he had attacked it, with the wheels and other heavy steel casting shattered and on fire.

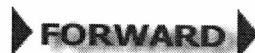
Peter served what amounted to three consecutive *combat* tours of duty before the administrative system caught up with him and posted him to training duties. On the intellectual level Cope justified his 'overtime' on photographic operations because he felt, obviously with the support of his immediate superiors, he was making an excellent contribution to the war effort—otherwise squadron staff officers would have ensured his normal rotation. A flying enthusiast however, he was certainly enjoying some of the more visceral aspects of riding over 1,000 mph at 400 mph, acquiring intelligence that helped the Allies plan and execute the defeat of Nazism, with the ability to take out his share of Nazi forces in more direct ways.

Since Cope had demonstrated particular skill in ground attack, he was posted to various operations units, where he earned the Pilot Attack Instructor qualification on aircraft such as the Spitfire, while teaching how to shoot and blow the *right* things up. Peter's ability is indicated by his gaining the specialist qualification in armament development. On these postings Cope was moved around a considerable amount as the RAF apparently wanted to spread his particular expertise around.

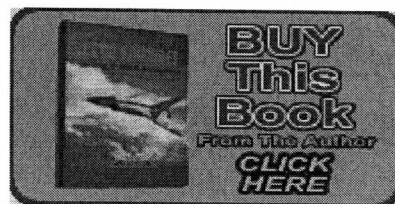
Cope also applied for the new and esteemed Empire Test Pilots School, where Britain trained her best test advanced aircraft during their development. He was selected for the fourth-ever course. The carrot dangled in front of those with the passion for high-performance enthusiasts was that the final portion of the course, with performance and handling testing of all classes of landplanes, was only granted to the top 10 pilots on the course. So, due to the exigencies of the war, all the graduates would do a period of service after the first half of the course. Peter ranked third in his class before undertaking his mandatory three years of testing service to the RAF at Boscombe Down on fighter development. Boscombe Down was also home to the RAF air combat fighting school, which flew captured German aircraft, and the work of the two squadrons interfaced. As a result, Peter was one of the lucky few who had the opportunity to fly some of Britain's precious war prizes. Here he flew many aircraft, but primarily various Mosquito, Typhoon and Tempest development types, and helped develop attack methods and equipment for the coming allied invasion of Fortress Europe. He also taught those skills to others, who applied them to operational training procedures. In the course of these efforts, Peter would sometimes, semi-surreptitiously, fly combat missions on the Mosquito and Tempest aircraft. He was involved in the development of the new armament, piercing rockets, along with their deployment in terms of tactics, and the experience would help him evaluate and improve his abilities and usefulness to the war effort. Such freelancing was apparently not interdicted by the RAF, again shows their approval, and that Peter sought such duties shows his relative enthusiasm and competence.

work.

After finishing the last phase of the Empire Test Pilots School course, Peter continued working with attack aircraft at the legendary Boscombe Down and Farnborough airfields as a military test pilot. He is known for some spectacular air displays during the heyday of the Farnborough air shows. He performed a particular display with the Martin MB.5 fighter prototype, with some insisting his precision and grace in this powerful aircraft more than rivalled the next year's famous performance in this craft by Zurakowski.



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