

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN AVIATION MUSEUM

SIGNIFICANT AVIATOR PROFILES

Mustang CA-18 Mk 21 A68-119 VH-IVI

This is the story of Langdon Badger's acquisition of Mustang CA-18 Mk21 A68-119 VH-IVI.

After studying Art in Adelaide, Langdon Badger went to Sydney in 1949. He studied Industrial and Interior Design at the Sydney Technical College, where he was awarded honours degrees in both. He returned to Adelaide and worked and lectured in interior design at night, gaining so many clients that he opened a shop in the city. The shop was an instant success and funded his later aviation pursuits. On 5 June 1961 he started learning to fly, gaining his unrestricted licence. He purchased his first aircraft, a Mooney VH-MBO, on 1



Emu Field South, to the right of the Submarine conning tower where the atomic bombs were exploded

[Photo: Langdon Badger]

February 1963 and added Mustang A68-119 VH-IVI on 2 June 1969, by then with 750 hours command, which he used to fly interstate and locally on business. Because of continuing irritation from the Department of Civil Aviation over legally getting the Mustang on the register, he sold both aircraft and replaced them with a tip-tanked P39 Twin Comanche VH-MED on 20 March 1972. The PA39 had the range to fly anywhere in the Pacific, which enabled him to look at WW II wrecks and experience the scenery and cultures of the region. Missing the Mustang's speed, he bought his first Aerostar VH-UYU on 22 March 1976, which he replaced with a second, VH-UYV, on 1 March 1978 as a Ted Smith Aerostar agent. He kept UYV for 33 years until, sadly, he sold it on retiring aged 80 years. Langdon now gets his enjoyment working on projects and his Spitfire UP-O EE853 at the South Australian Aviation Museum.



Mooney in a small clearing at Emu Field South behind Mustang A68-30

[Photo – Langdon Badger]

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I heard about six Mustangs parked at Emu Field. Emu Field is about 930 kilometres north-west of Adelaide in the north-west corner of the Woomera Prohibited Area. It is where the British carried out "Operation Totem", which included two atomic tests in October 1953. Various items of military equipment, including the aircraft, had been parked in different areas of the site to determine the effect of the

atomic blasts on them. The Mustangs, which had been flown up for the tests from RAAF Tocumwal, came through relatively unscathed, but they and the rest of the equipment were abandoned there after the tests. Later tests were moved 165 kilometres south to the less-remote Maralinga site.

I was determined to find the aircraft, although the location was just in the Maralinga radioactive area and not disclosed. I flew from Ayers Rock in our Mooney Mk21 VH-



*Part of the row of Mustangs at Emu Field South
[Photo: Langdon Badger]*



*Mustang A68-119 on grass at Moorabbin, with no plugs in the exhaust stubs, prior to sale to Ed Fleming
[Photo – Geoff Goodall]*



*Mustang A68-119 at Nowra after engine failure and diversion prior to my purchase on 2 June 1969
[Photo: Langdon Badger]*

MBO on 25 April 1966 with three friends, seven years after the tests, finding Emu and then Emu South where the Mustangs were lined up on a dirt strip. Some were behind revetments but, worse, there were obstacles placed to make the strip useless. There was a small circular area nearby that had been cleared for tents in the past, so after a careful check I made a precautionary short-field landing there.

The following year the British returned to the site to clean it up and bury any remaining equipment and buildings.

My trip to Emu made me very excited about Mustangs and shortly afterward I heard about one for sale that had just made it to Nowra Naval base aerodrome on the NSW south coast after an engine failure enroute from Moorabbin (Melbourne) to Camden (Sydney). I flew to Nowra in the Mooney to inspect Mustang A68-119 and purchased her on the spot on 2 June 1969 from Ed Fleming of Sky Services Camden, who had purchased her from Dr Ralph Capponi for

shipment to the US. I already owned two nil-hour RR Merlin engines, including one with a log book, so I got Ed, who was a Mustang pilot and Rolls Royce engineer, to install one of them for me in the aircraft, now pushed just off the runway at Nowra.¹ He then flew her to Camden for a complete overhaul. Pierce Dunn at Mildura in Victoria supplied a new canopy and radiator.

A68-119 was delivered to 1 Aircraft Depot at Laverton in Victoria from the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation on 11 June 1948 and issued to 78 Wing on 12 August. She was returned to 1 AD in July 1950, went to RAAF East Sale in August 1950 then back to 1 AD in February 1956 for storage. She was struck off and disposed of for scrap to the RAAF's scrap smelting agent, RH Grant Trading Company, and moved to RAAF Tocumwal NSW on 23 April 1958.



*Mustang A68-119 deteriorating outside at Tocumwal
[Photo – Geoff Goodall]*

A68-119 was not scrapped and was the last of the Mustangs to be sold from disposals at Tocumwal where she had deteriorated in the open. Dr Capponi, of Melbourne, purchased her in 1964 and had her restored there then flown to Moorabbin. At the time the Department of Civil Aviation AIPs said all Military aircraft were suspect and could not go on the civil register. The Doctor had flown 119 to



*Being taken to Bathurst to obtain a P51 conversion
[Photo: Unknown/Langdon Badger Collection]*

many capitals under the guise she would be sold and shipped outside the country where she could be flown, but when further ferry flights were prohibited 119 sat under the pine trees at Moorabbin without the standard wooden plugs in the exhaust stubs. This caused the engine failure and diversion to Nowra.

My partner in the Mooney, a brilliant Lawyer Trevor Olsson, wrote to the DCA's director general Donald Anderson asking "Which of the aircraft our boys in the RAAF flew were suspect and which were not?" He further wrote "you state all

military aircraft are suspect. That is like saying all women are stupid, which is not possible."

¹ The other engine, without a logbook, is on display in the Spitfire enclosure at the South Australian Aviation Museum.

Mustang VH-IVI was on the civil register 3 weeks later on 20 June 1969.

Having flown to Sydney with Ansett on 27 June 1969, I went out to Camden, a totally unsuitable aerodrome, first getting a conversion on a Fairchild Argus to learn how to land on a Directional Gyro without forward vision. I did two circuits in the Mustang, the second in twilight with red flame blasting from the 12 exhaust stubs. Three circuits were required for an endorsement but I realised I would kill myself doing the third in the dark.

On the 3 August I was back again and did my three circuits at the more suitable Bathurst aerodrome, 200 kilometres west of Sydney, with no gum trees along the creek close to the threshold. I then had her flown to Moorabbin by Jock Garden of Civil Flying Services to have a modern radio, which could have two channels pre-set for quick change, fitted and an ADF. Radio was mandatory for operations at Moorabbin, so Jock had to arrange for approval to land by green light signal there at a set time when other traffic had been suspended for his arrival.



*I have done my 3 solos, which were good so I am very happy
[Photo: Unknown]*

The aircraft was wheeled out for the first radio check flight on 17 August carried out by Jock Garden accompanied by a staff member in the second seat. I then flew her back to Parafield on the same day.

Next I received a letter from the RAAF saying if I did not remove the roundel and RAAF markings I would be sued. There was another problem: a Mustang should fly at 1,500 feet in the circuit so from



*India Victor India now yellow in the Royal Aero Club of South Australia
Hangar at Parafield
[Photo: Barry Cuthbert]*

base you can do a curved descending approach to see the strip at all times until you are close, levelling the wings, switching to the DG and looking left and right for the ground to come up, then flaring. In Australia then there was only one circuit height of 1,000 feet and the other aircraft of the day you had to pass varied from Tiger Moths to Chipmunks, Proctors and Cessna 150s and 172s. I was worried about the possibility of a mid-air collision, so sadly had IVI painted yellow to make her more visible and to cover the roundels. Later a friend, Bob Eastgate, with VH-BOB, registered the roundel at the patent office and proved the RAAF was only bluffing anyway.

The Mustang was not difficult to fly.

You only had to open the throttle slowly because she was 2,000 pounds lighter than as originally equipped, and with 20 degrees of flap she flew herself off. Then you gave a short burst at 1760Hp to clear the plugs after retracting the gear. Mustangs fly themselves off just like the beautifully handling 120 Hp Chipmunk.

One trip I really enjoyed was Parafield-Dubbo on the way to Sydney on 4 October 1969. After landing the controller asked as I taxied in “Do you know what time you took off and the time now, as you have exceeded the speed allowed below 5,000 feet?” I replied “I did not exceed the airspeed but I had a ripper of a tail wind.” IVI averaged 265 knots and luckily there was a 5 knot tail wind. He laughed and never lodged a Form 225 Air Safety Incident Report.

I did over 102 wonderful hours flying IVI but the DCA had made it a requirement that only a Rolls Royce engineer could do the 50 and 100 hourly or 12 monthly overhauls. So first I took IVI to Camden, came home with Ansett, then returned to find Ed Fleming had put on about 12 hours testing her. In reality he was taking his friends for jollies for 12 hours and charging me for the 60 gallons of fuel per hour. Next I went to Civil in Moorabbin, where Jock Garden had organised the radios, and they were worse - putting on about 20 hours – including an aerobatic display at the Ballarat air show - at more than 60 gallons an hour all at my cost. This finally took the pleasure away from a wonderful experience.

I sold A68-119 to a Sydney businessman, Ray Whitbread. He flew her to Bankstown (Sydney) on 1 September 1970 where she was extensively overhauled and repainted. On 11 June 1973 he was killed in her in a crash near Windsor NSW when, according to the Aviation Safety Network of the Flight Safety Foundation,² the canopy detached and struck him in the head. My recollection is different. I believe Ray was practising aerobatics for an air show at 8,000 feet doing vertical eight-point upward rolls until the aircraft stalls. At that point the control surfaces must be centred or the aircraft will fall inverted, which requires 17,000 feet to recover from. Ray had undone his seat belts and jettisoned the canopy to bale out but did not have time. The canopy was the largest piece to survive the accident and is still in existence.

Langdon Badger
Mike Milln
July 2016



The Totem 1 explosion at Emu on 15 October 1953 and Emu Village in 1953, which housed over 400 scientists and military personnel. Both photographs are from Len Beadell's book *Blast the Bush*.



² See <http://aviation-safety.net/wikibase/wiki.php?id=86963> [accessed 28 May 2016]