“I had arrived in England just after D-Day and was assigned to the 487th Fighter Squadron of the 352nd Fighter Group. My first half a dozen or so combat missions were spent flying a P-51 Mustang on Colonel John Meyer’s wing, protecting the bombers and looking for targets of opportunity.”

Based at Bodney, Norfolk, 1st Lt Alden Rigby described his new boss: “Meyer did not have much time or patience for the new guys. He was not the fatherly type and ruled with an iron hand, but he was the head honcho of our group and you had to have clear discipline in order to survive in a fighter unit.”

Then he was introduced to George Preddy: “After I flew some more missions with Meyer, one of the other experienced pilots from the squadron kind of took me under his wing. His name was George Preddy, he called me ‘Rig’ and immediately made me feel like one of the guys.”

“I began to fly as George’s wingman on quite a few missions during the late summer of 1944. He was a great guy to fly with, as he was smooth..."
with his throttle and at the same
time a real tiger during combat. I
could pretty much anticipate his
manoeuvring except for when he
spotted an enemy fighter because
things got real interesting in a hurry.

“As his wingman I just tried to
stay glued to him and protect
his six o’clock. Believe you me
that was easier said than done!
When George Preddy latched
onto a fleeting Bf 109 or Fw
190, you didn’t hear him
talking on the radio because he
became focused on his prey.

“Some of the other guys
in the squadron got a
little excited and kept
a running log of
the battle over
the radio.
George

“As his wingman I just tried to stay
glued to him and protect his six
o’clock. Believe you me that was easier
said than done!”
kept silent and focused on the task at hand. That's what made him such a great fighter pilot.

"When we returned from a mission and debriefed a flight, George was very matter of fact and to the point during the after-encounter critique. He was easier to deal with than some of the other 'big boys' as there was really no ego to go along with his fighter pilot persona. We had good leaders and a great squadron and I felt fortunate to have flown with many of them in the 352nd."

The best of the best

"When George was sent back home in the fall of 1944 for some well-deserved rest and recreation, I was really hoping he would come back to the squadron. Upon his return, they gave him command of the 328th Fighter Squadron and I had mixed feelings about it. On one hand, I missed flying his wing because he was really the best of the best in my mind. But I knew he was a great leader and deserved the promotion.

"Both George and I flew on Christmas Day 1944 in support of the 'Bulge' operations but unfortunately we did not fly together. On that mission I was back on Colonel Meyer's wing again, but this time I was flying in a new P-51D Mustang.

"Unfortunately I had some problems right off the bat; I had an oil seal that was leaking. It was one of those missions where I had a lot of problems seeing out the windscreen and keeping track of Colonel Meyer's P-51. I did my best to stay with him, but it was futile with the coating of oil blocking my view. When we landed, the only thing Meyer said to me was:"

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**Major George E Preddy**

P-51 Mustang 'HO-P', south east of Hamburg, August 6, 1944

I was Group Leader. We were escorting the lead combat wing of B-17s when 50-plus Me 109s in formation came into the third box from the south. We were 1000 ft above them so I led "White Flight", consisting of Lt Heyer, Lt Doeac and myself, in astern of them. I opened fire on one near the rear from 500 yards dead astern and got many hits around the cockpit. The E/A [enemy aircraft] went down inverted, in flames. At this time Lt Doeac became lost, while shooting down an Me 109 that had gotten on Lt Heyer's tail.

Lt Heyer and I continued our attack and I drove up behind another E/A, getting hits around the wing roots and setting him on fire after a short burst. He went spinning down and the pilot bailed out after a few turns at 20,000 ft. I saw Lt Heyer on my right shoot down another E/A.

The enemy formation stayed together taking practically no evasive action and tried to get back for an attack on the bombers, who were off to the right. We continued with our attack on the rear end and I fired on another from close range astern. He went down smoking badly and I saw him begin to fall apart below us.

At this time four other P-51s came in to help us with the attack. I fired at another 109 causing him to burn after a short burst. He spiralled down to the right in flames. The formation headed down in a left turn, still keeping themselves together in rather close formation. I got a good burst into another one, causing him to burn and spin down.

The E/A were down to 5,000 ft now and one pulled off to the left. I was all alone with them now so went after this single 109 before he could get on my tail. I got an ineffective burst into him causing him to smoke a little. I pulled up into a steep climb to the left above him and he climbed after me.

I pulled it in as tight as possible, climbing at about 1500 mph. The 'Hun' opened fire on me but could not get enough deflection to do any damage. With my initial speed I slightly out-climbed him. He flew off to my left and I dropped down astern on him. He jettisoned his canopy and I fired a short burst, getting many hits. As I pulled past, the pilot bailed out at about 7,000 ft.

I had lost all friendly and enemy aircraft so headed home alone. I claim six Me 109s destroyed.
“When George was sent back home in the fall of 1944 for some well-deserved rest and recreation, I was really hoping he would come back to the squadron”
'Get that thing fixed and go out again this afternoon!'

‘I flew two missions that Christmas Day and returned to our base safely. Unfortunately when I landed I heard the worse news of the war; my friend, George Preddy, never made it back home and was killed by friendly fire. It was a terrible loss of a great pilot and a great man on a day set aside for peace.’

Major George E. Preddy, commanding officer of the 352nd Fighter Group’s 328th Fighter Squadron was shot down by friendly fire over Belgium on December 25, 1944. He was the USAF’s leading Mustang ace with 26.83 victories – plus three others while flying the P-47 Thunderbolt.

“I flew two missions that Christmas Day and returned to our base safely. Unfortunately when I landed I heard the worse news of the war; my friend George Preddy, never made it back home…”

‘Cripes A Mighty’
Coded ‘PE-P’

Several of Major Preddy’s aircraft carried the ‘Cripes A Mighty’ name on the cowling during World War Two. The first is thought to have been Republic P-47D Thunderbolt 42-8500 ‘HO-P’, followed by Cripes A Mighty 2nd, a P-51B, serial number 42-106451 ‘HO-P’. Next came P-51D 44-13321 ‘HO-P’ Cripes A Mighty 3rd and finally P-51D 44-14906 ‘PE-P’. Flying the latter in late 1944 with the 328th Fighter Squadron Major Preddy shot down three Messerschmitt Bf 109s and a Focke-Wulf Fw 190, plus claimed a Fw 190 probable and one damaged.

Tom Ungurean’s P-51D N151BW proudly carries the ‘PE-P’ markings, in tribute to the high-scoring ace. N151BW started its military career as 44-74813, and was transferred to Canada as 9263 in the early 1950s. It was ‘demobbed’ in the late 1950s and passed through a number of private owners in the USA. It has had various US registrations over the years including N6301T, N251KW and N151KW. Today it is registered as N151BW.
P-51D Cripes A Mighty 3rd which is operated by Florida-based Kermit Weeks, originally served post-war with the RNZAF as ZK417. It was acquired by Ron Fechney of Canterbury, New Zealand, in 1958 and was later registered as ZK-CGG. After a spell as a warbird in New Zealand it moved to a new owner in the USA in 1974 and it today part of the Weeks Air Museum collection. It took on its “Cripes A Mighty 3rd” identity in 1987 and won the EAA Warbird Grand Champion award at Oshkosh that same year. Major Preddy achieved considerable success while flying the real 44-13321 "HO-P" in combat, shooting down ten Messerschmitt Bf 109s, plus another probable and a half Bf 109 kill. He is also credited with the following victories in "HO-P": one Focke-Wulf Fw 190; a Messerschmitt Me 410 (half kill); two Junkers Ju 88s, one Ju 88 probable and another two damaged.

P-51D Mustang NL921 is operated by Kermit Weeks and represents Major George E Preddy's aircraft, "Cripes A Mighty 3rd."