

Peter J. McMahon



Peter J. McMahon was born November 28, 1923 at Yukon, PA. He attended grade school at Eldersville and was graduated from Union High School at Burgettstown, PA in 1941.

Like much of the youth in America at that time who grew up in the golden Age of Flight with pilots as their heroes, Peter McMahon had just learned how to fly. He had started taking lessons in high school. But only six months after graduation, the Japanese attacked Pearly Harbor and the United States was plunged into World War II. So McMahon decided to join the Army Air Corps.

Peter enlisted at Pittsburgh, PA on June 4, 1942 and reported for indoctrination at Nashville, TN on November 11, 1942. His

flight training began at Maxwell Field, AL in February 1942 and continued at Carlstrom Field, FL in April, Cochran Field, GA in June and Spence Field, GA in August 1943. He was awarded his wings October 1, 1943.

McMahon was stationed at Drew Field, FL when he volunteered for combat with the 339th Fighter Group where he was assigned to the 505th Fighter Squadron.

After flying P-39 Air Cobras as part of desert maneuvers with an Army Division in California, the 339th was sent to Hunter Field, GA for overseas orientation. On March 20, 1944, pilots and ground echelon sailed from New York aboard the British troop ship *Sterling Castle*, arriving in Liverpool, England on April 4th.

The 339th Fighter Group was assigned to Station F378, Fowlmere, England, where they spent the next three weeks training in their new P-51 Mustangs. On April 30th, the 339th Fighter Group flew their first combat mission in the ETO (European Theater of Operations).

McMahon flew his first combat mission on May 6, 1944. Exactly one month later (D-Day), he shot down two JU-87 Stuka dive bombers on their way to bomb the invasion beaches at Normandy. On June 8th, he scored again downing one FW-190 and sharing another with squadron mate Jim Starnes, giving Pete 3 ½ kills in three days.

On July 11, 1944, McMahon was scheduled to fly his thirty-ninth combat mission. He had no way of knowing it would be his last. As he was taxiing into position for take-off, his Mustang developed electrical problems. He moved his disabled plane off the runway and headed back to find another mount. After ground crews quickly readied another Mustang, he was

finally ready to take-off. However, taking off late and flying through 3,000 feet of overcast, Pete could not locate his group. At this point, he should have aborted. But McMahan was not only a good pilot, he was an aggressive pilot. He decided to fly on alone, determined to complete the mission. That was the last that anyone has seen or heard from Lt. Peter J. McMahan.

Years later, a French military researcher contacted the 339th Fighter Group Association with information on Lt. Mc Mahon's last mission. Apparently, when Pete decided to fly his solo mission, he must have flown the same flight plan he was given at briefing that morning. He knew he could not break radio silence to find the group. So, finding himself over enemy territory, he did what he was trained to do. With no enemy planes in the area to engage, he chose a ground attack role.

The P-51, with its water-cooled engine, was vulnerable to ground fire at low altitudes. Peter McMahan died when his plane was shot down while strafing a rail yard near Busigny, France on July 11, 1944.

Pete was not hunting for medals or glory – he was just doing his job – a job that cost his last full measure of devotion.