

P-51D-5-NA, 44-13859, KI-S of Lt. Walter "Moon" Mullins of the 55th Fighter Squadron, 20th Fighter Group.



Illustration 1: KI-S at King's Cliffe airfield in the summer of 1944

The 20th Fighter Group were originally a famous P38 Group. They came to England in August 1943. The Group included some famous and colourful aces like Jack Ilfrey, James Morris and Lindol Graham but none of these was in the 55th which received less publicity, then and now.¹

The 20th Fighter Group was based at King's Cliffe airfield in Northamptonshire, in a particularly wooded part of the midlands of England called Rockingham Forest. This proved useful for dispersal of various airfield accommodation and utility sites; Illustration 3 below (from the 20th FG website – see footnote 1 below) shows many buildings dispersed in an ancient wood called Bedford Purlieu. The 55th Fighter Squadron was based on the north-west corner of the airfield.²

The squadron exchanged their P38s for P51s in July 1944. Mullins' Mustang was one of the early P51Ds, without a fin fillet, as can be clearly seen in Illustration 1 (from the Web-Birds website³), above. This made them laterally unstable, hence the need for the later modification. The Web-Birds website suggests that this Mustang was called "Little Lady" but it appears to have had no name; the Mustang shown on the 20th website with that name is a later Mustang with the nose markings which

¹ For information on the 20th see the website: <http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/Quarters/6940/contents2.html>

² Airfield Focus 66: King's Cliffe, John N. Smith GMS Enterprises UK, Not dated.

³ <http://www.web-birds.com/8th/20/20th.htm>

seem to have been used from November 1944, some time after Mullins' Mustang was lost (although one source claims these markings came in in August-September⁴). The nose marking of a diving woman can be clearly seen on this advertisement for decals ("transfers" to the British):



Illustration 2: Markings of KI-S from a commercial decals advertisement

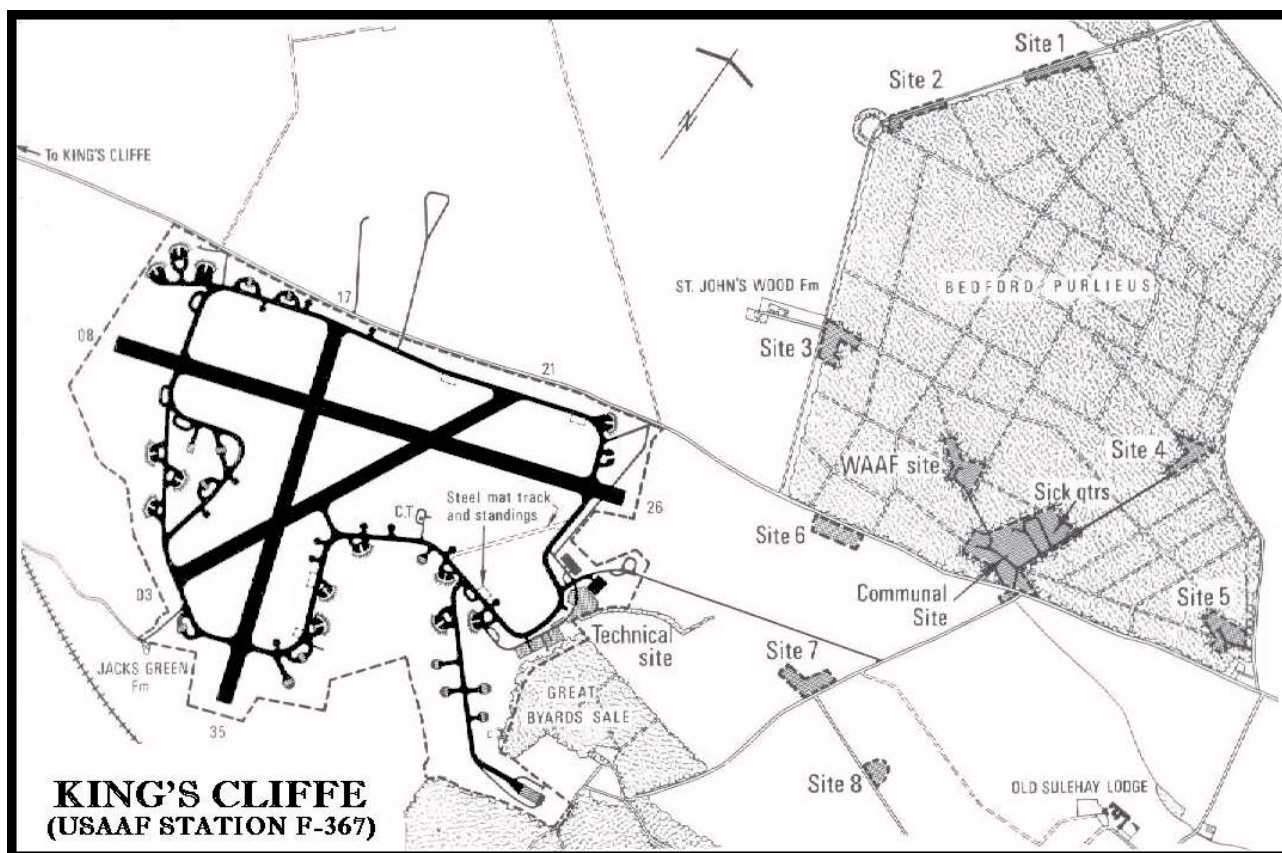


Illustration 3: Plan of King's Cliffe airfield in WW2, showing outstations

4 <http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/Quarters/6940/20thfg.html>

Mullins is an elusive figure. A list of squadron pilots from May 1944 does not mention him; he appears to have been a newcomer to the squadron in the summer of 1944 and I have not yet come across a photograph of him.

About the only fact of note that can be discovered about him is that he scored a victory on the 14th July 1944, details unknown.⁵ This seems to have been on the mission which is recorded as: “14 July 1944 94 of 100 P-38s fly fighter-bomber missions against rail targets E and SE of Paris; they claim 2-0-0 Luftwaffe aircraft; 1 P-38 is lost (pilot is MIA).”⁶

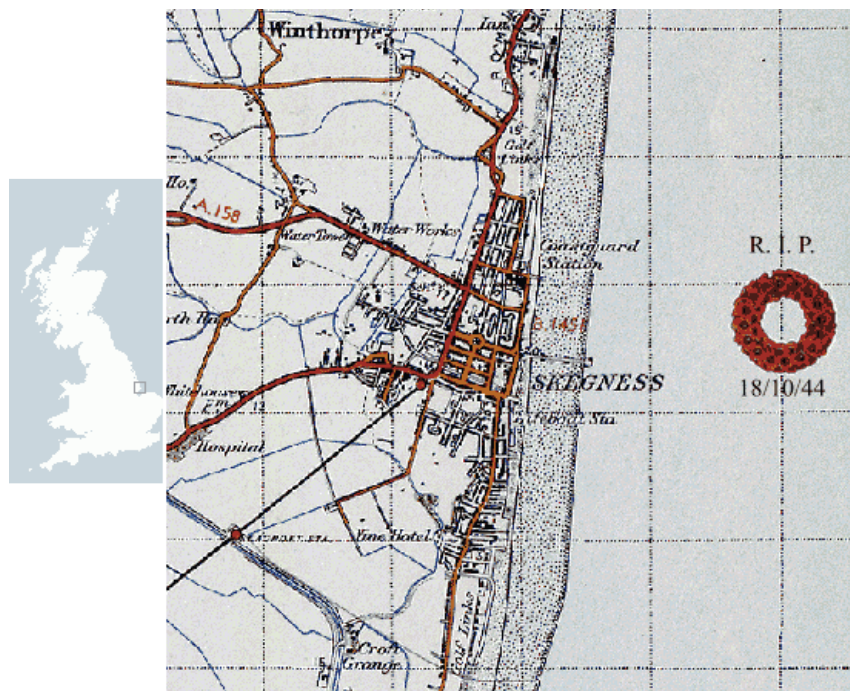


Illustration 4: Map from 1940 1" Ordnance Survey, showing approximate last resting place of Walter Mullins and his Mustang

Walter Mullins died in a flying accident on the 18th October 1944, when this Mustang crashed into the North Sea 1 mile east of Skegness, Lincolnshire during a training exercise.⁷ As far as I can tell, both he and the Mustang are still there.

Walter Mullins is commemorated on the Wall of the Missing at Madingley Cemetery, Cambridge, UK (Illustration 5); this also adds the fact that he came from Texas, which may help with tracking down any surviving relatives.⁸

⁵ http://www.au.af.mil/au/afhra/wwwroot/aerial_victory_credits/avc_wwii_mos_myl.html

⁶ <http://paul.rutgers.edu/~mcgrew/wwii/usaf/Jul.44>

⁷ <http://www.accident-report.com/UK/194410.html>

⁸ <http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/Quarters/6940/memory.html>



Illustration 5: Walter Mullins' name on the Wall of the Missing at Madingley Cemetery, Cambridge, with a general shot of the Wall: photographs by Robert Pike

David Morfitt (aka MB5), 11th November 2005 . I am grateful for help from Steve Bryant (LDF) and Brian Okland (the reference to Mullins' kill), and to Robert Pike for the photographs of Madingley Cemetery.