



Lope's Hope 3rd

DAKOTA TERRITORY AIR MUSEUM'S LOPE'S HOPE 3RD, WARBIRD GRAND CHAMPION 2018

by Chuck Cravens



Night Run, photo courtesy EAA/Chris & Ben Miller





Lopez's Hope 3rd at Bemidji Regional Airport, ready to head to Oshkosh AirVenture 2018

Don Lopez, the inspiration for this restoration

As far as is known, Lopez's Hope 3rd is the first P-51C restored to honor Mustangs serving in China. Donald and Lopez's Hope 3rd served in the China-Burma-India theater with the 14th Air Force, 23rd Fighter Group, 75th Squadron. The 75th's mission throughout its service in China was to establish air superiority and strafe airfields, supplies, and Japanese troop concentrations.

The squadron flew from several airfields in China and moved from base to base, depending on the position of the front lines separating the Chinese army and the invaders from Japan. The 75th and sister squadrons, the 74th and 76th, were able to command the airspace and prevent the Japanese from developing a consistently effective bombing campaign in China during the final three years of the war.

Lt. Lopez flew 101 combat missions and had 5 victories in China.



Donald Lopez, Sr., Deputy Director of the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum. Photo courtesy of the Lopez family.



Colorized image of Lt Lopez in China with Lope's Hope 3rd. Photo courtesy of the Lopez family, colorization by Nathan Howland



Don relaxes on the wing of Lope's Hope 3rd in China, 1944. Photo courtesy of the Lopez family, colorization by Nathan Howland



Donald Lopez and Lope's Hope 3rd. Photo courtesy of the Lopez family, colorization by Nathan Howland

Don Lopez's contributions to aviation didn't stop with World War II. He went on to serve as a test pilot when the Air Force became a separate branch and transitioned to the early jets. At the close of World War II, Donald was assigned to the elite Proof Test Group of the Air Proving Ground Command at Eglin Field in Florida. There he test flew the P-59, P-80, and P-84, testing weapons systems, suitability for operational status, and developing tactics in the new jets.

Don also flew a tour in Korea, and spent five years helping establish the aeronautics department and teaching at the Air Force Academy.

In 1972, Lopez joined the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum as assistant director of aeronautics. He was serving as deputy director of the National Air and Space Museum at the time of his death in 2008.

Donald was instrumental in the planning and administration of both the museum on the Mall, which opened in 1976, and the Udvar-Hazy Center at near Dulles International Airport, which opened in 2003. Today, visitors to Hazy are greeted by a snarling P-40 with "Lope's Hope" on the cowling and 194 on the tail. Don's resting place is marked by a simple soldier's headstone at Arlington National Cemetery.



During the summer of 2017, the Lopezes visited AirCorps to see Lope's Hope 3rd. From left, Warren Pietsch, Laura Lopez (Don's granddaughter), Bruce Eames, Dr. Donald Lopez, Jr., and Erik Hokuf at AirCorps Aviation.



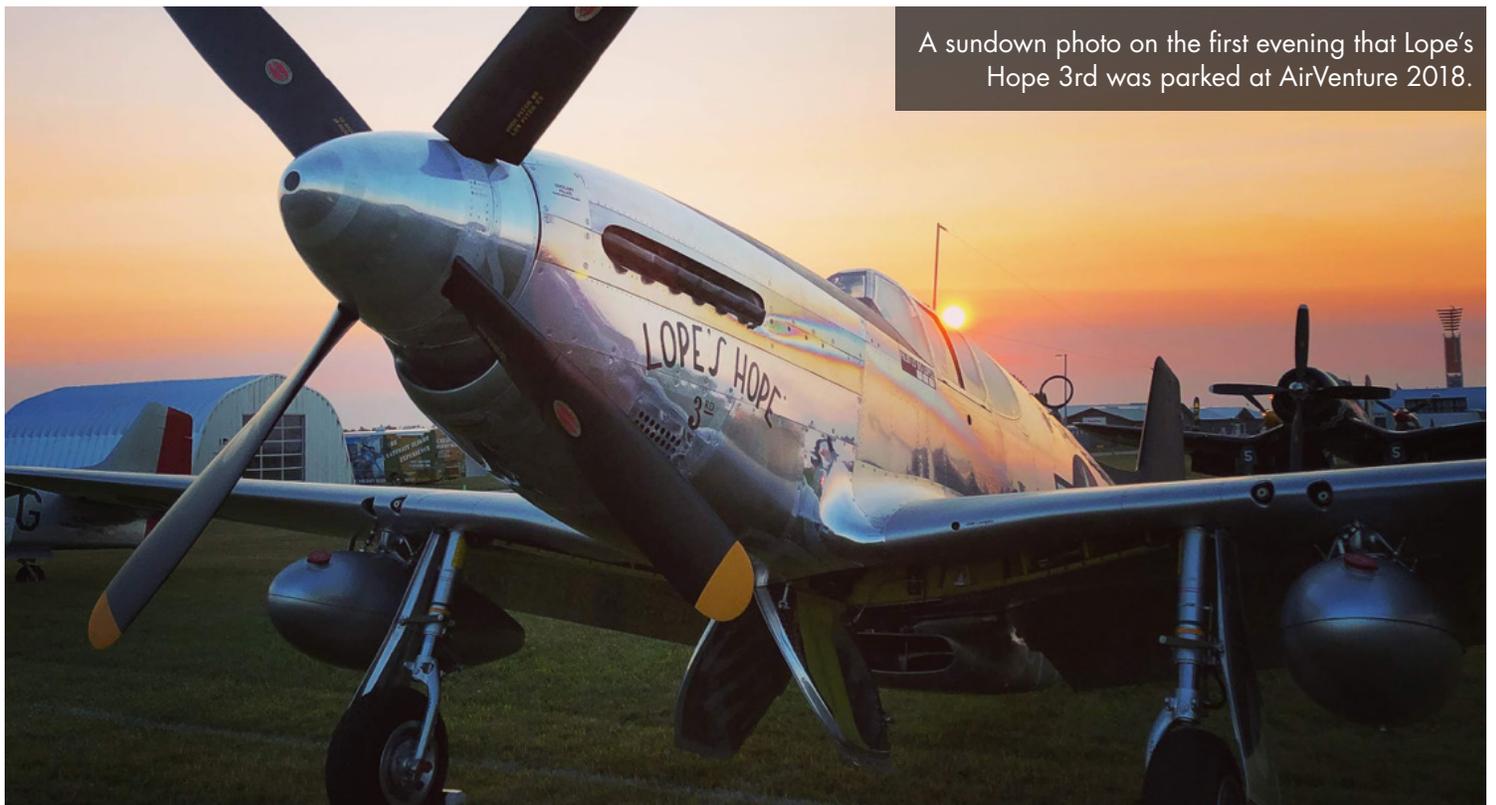
Lt. Lopez's granddaughter Laura experiences what her grandfather saw and felt as he sat in Lope's Hope 3rd 73 years ago.



Leaving for Oshkosh



Warren taxis out in Lope's Hope 3rd.



A sundown photo on the first evening that Lope's Hope 3rd was parked at AirVenture 2018.



Preparation

Any time AirCorps presents a restored warbird for judging at Oshkosh, a great deal of preparation occurs to be certain that the airplane is presented at its best.

Before the trip, a 44 page judging book was prepared, to highlight details of the restoration that demonstrate craftsmanship, and both historical and technical accuracy.



Lope's Hope on the cover of the judging book.
Photo by Scott Slocum



Erik has help from his son Gavin as they remove the butterfly fairings to allow the judges access to see inside.



Dan and Mark are checking everything over.



Aaron touches up the tow hooks on the landing gear to make sure the red paint on them is perfect.



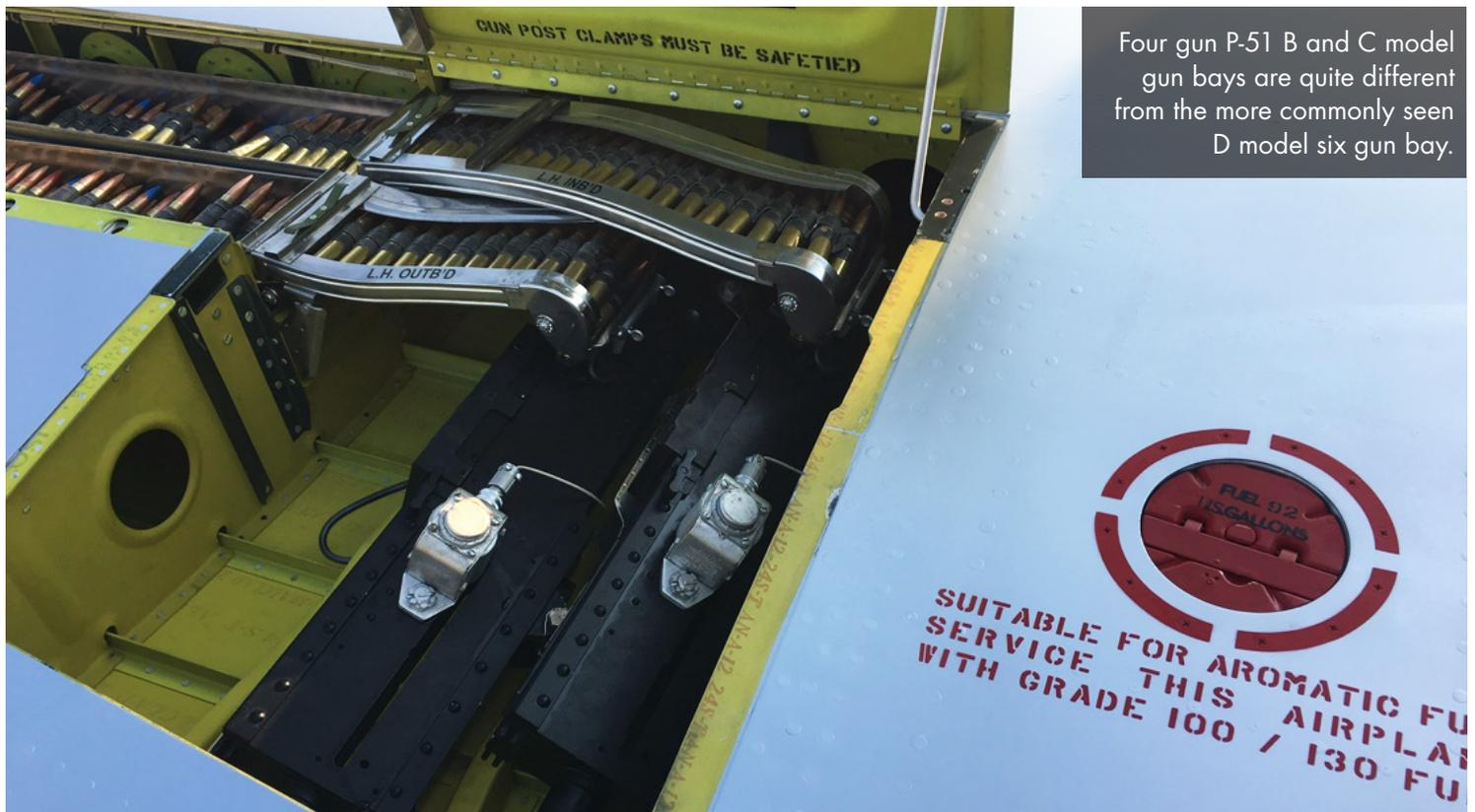
Ryan tends to the main landing gear as Sam wipes down the wing.



Mark works on a panel.



The air induction system and filter box are visible with the cowl off. Panels are removed so that the judges can easily see the details of the restoration.



Four gun P-51 B and C model gun bays are quite different from the more commonly seen D model six gun bay.



Another difference in the gun installation on the C model is part number [97-61327](https://aircorpslibrary.com/drawing/viewer/97-61327), the gun port sleeve assembly. Technical drawings for this assembly are available at this link: <https://aircorpslibrary.com/drawing/viewer/97-61327/p-51>



Display Boards

Display boards were an important part of the Lope's Hope 3rd presentation. AirCorps' historian composed, titled and obtained photo permissions. Then the material created was used by Evolve Creative to design attractive display boards. These were mounted on sandwich board stands for easy set up and take down.

Great air to air photography by Brent Clark, Scott Slocum, William Morgan and Matt McVicker made the boards eye-catching for Oshkosh attendees.

NORTH AMERICAN P-51C MUSTANG LOPE'S HOPE 3RD

HOPE

On the Cover

LOPE'S HOPE 3RD, one of nine flying early model P-51B and P-51C Mustangs, retook the skies on October 16, 2017 after restoration at AirCorps Aviation. This immaculate aircraft will continue to inspire, honor, grace photos and covers of publications into the future.

Photo courtesy of Matt G. McVicker

ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE WITH A GREAT

TEAM

AirCorps Aviation

"FULFILLING DREAMS THROUGH PRESERVATION OF HISTORICAL AIRCRAFT"

2018

AIRCORPS AVIATION

"The beauty of the clouds and the sun was surpassed only by the shadows of the airplanes on the clouds surrounded by a rainbow halo. If I had to do only one thing for the rest of my life, I think that would be it. It was what heaven should be like for fighter pilots."

-David Taylor

© Donald B. Jones, "On the Edge of the Top" (Shutterstock, LLC)

2017

P-51C 45-24907 "Lope's Hope 3rd" took the skies in October of 2017, decades later. Don Lopez Sr. who flew in the Chino-Burnside (CB) theater with the 14th Air Force, 23rd Fighter Group, 75th Squadron.

2015

THE "BUG" STEARMAN
On July 10th, 2015 #N251 Stearman, flew over the air for the first time in many years after completing a extensive 8 month restoration. Also being restored by the rigids the 2347 was awarded Steve Stearman and a Silver award plaque.

2015

Reborn Grand Champion Working Stearman
Swill at Oshkosh AirVenture 2015. Members of the Babco family presented left to right in front of the wings are Tom Babco, and Diane Babco. Also standing to see the Mustang named after her mother was Sue Hayward and her husband Kim.

2011

Grand Champion Working Turbule Star
at AirVenture 2011. Mark Talar, Chad Mikul, Eric Hinkel, Eric Trambull, and Dan Mankak stand in front, with Stefan Mikul and his poor kit on the wing.



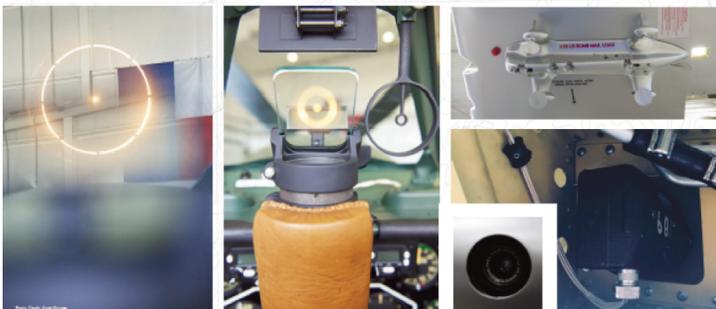
NORTH AMERICAN P-51C MUSTANG

LOPE'S HOPE
3rd

Restoring Hope: Armament



Photo courtesy of Brent Clark



NORTH AMERICAN P-51C MUSTANG

LOPE'S HOPE
3rd

Restoring Hope: Cockpit



Photo courtesy of Brent Clark





NORTH AMERICAN P-51C MUSTANG

LOPE'S HOPE
3rd

Restoring Hope: Structure



NORTH AMERICAN P-51C MUSTANG

LOPE'S HOPE
3rd

Restoring Hope: Engine & Firewall Forward





NORTH AMERICAN P-51C MUSTANG

LOPEZ'S HOPE
3RD

Fast and Far

Lopez's Hope 3rd, essentially identical B, C and RAF Mark II model Mustangs were the first production P-51s with Packard Merlin power. Photo by Scott Gleason.



NORTH AMERICAN P-51C MUSTANG SPECIFICATIONS

- **BUILT:** Dallas, TX
- **ENGINE:** Rolls-Royce "Merlin" V-1650-7 Liquid cooled, fuel injected V-12 inline, 1800 hp @ 3000rpm
- **PROPELLER:** Hamilton Standard, 11'2 inch 4 blade (hydraulic)
- **ARMAMENT:** 4 x .50 Caliber Machine Guns 2 x 500 lb. Bombs
- **LENGTH:** 32'
- **HEIGHT:** 13'8"
- **WINGSPAN:** 37'
- **EMPTY WEIGHT:** 6,985 lbs
- **MAX WEIGHT:** 11,800 lbs
- **RANGE:** 1,900 miles with drop tanks 1,180 miles internal tanks
- **SERVICE CEILING:** 41,800 ft
- **MAX SPEED:** 439 mph @ 29,000 ft
- **CLIMB PERFORMANCE:** to 10,000ft. 2.1 min., to 20,000 ft. 6.9 min.

Lopez's Hope 3rd was 42-103585, a P-51C-5NT Mustang assigned to Lieutenant Donald Lopez. At the time he was assigned to the 75th Squadron of the 23rd Fighter Group, 14th Air Force. Lt. Lopez had 1 damaged and one confirmed victory in Lopez's Hope 3rd and 5 confirmed victories overall.



North American General Aviation Number: 104-00002
Army Air Force Serial Number: 43-24907
Construction Number: 102-26538

Order: AC-33940 (1350 airplanes)
North American Aviation Ship Number: 1006
FAA Registration: N65558

WWII Combat Markings:
14th Air Force, 23rd Fighter Group, 75th Squadron,
Theater of Operations: China-Burma-India

Wartime Pilot:
Lt. Donald Lopez
A.S.N. 14,101,819
5 Victories





Visitors & Special Guests

The best reason to display a warbird at AirVenture is to share it with the people who attend. The history of the warbirds, the great men who flew them, and the sacrifices and effort that united America and allowed us to emerge victorious are preserved in a dramatically visual way by flying warbirds. Talking to people who stop by the display of a warbird allows that same history to be told in detail specific to a single plane like P-51C Lope's Hope 3rd.

We spoke with thousands of visitors and had some very special people stop by.

Erik does a video interview in front of Lope's Hope 3rd. Several video interviews were done for various media groups by AirCorps staff.



Lyle Jansma of AeroCapture Images did a shoot for their app Cockpit 360. He did a great job documenting interior and panel of Lope's Hope 3rd. <https://www.facebook.com/EAA/photos/a.410636043622/10156847316993623/?type=3&theater>





Smithsonian National Air & Space Museum



Dorothy Cochrane, Curator of General Aviation at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum and NASM Deputy Director Christopher Browne visit with Warren Pietsch about Don Lopez Sr., Lope's Hope 3rd and its connection to the Smithsonian.



Christopher Browne, who holds the position Don Lopez once held at the National Air and Space Museum, had a chance to experience what Don felt sitting in the cockpit of Lope's Hope 3rd.



Ken Voight



It's pretty unusual to see a parrot in the warbird area at AirVenture, but there's a good reason for this avian visitor's presence on Bernie Vasquez's finger.

Lt. Lopez had a pet parrot in China, and Ken Voight brought the parrot and a bit of interesting history: *"My father-in-law was in China and flew some missions with Lopez. It always cracked him up when he talked about Lopes' parrot and if the parrot started drooping his head, Lopez would give it oxygen."* - **Kent Voight**

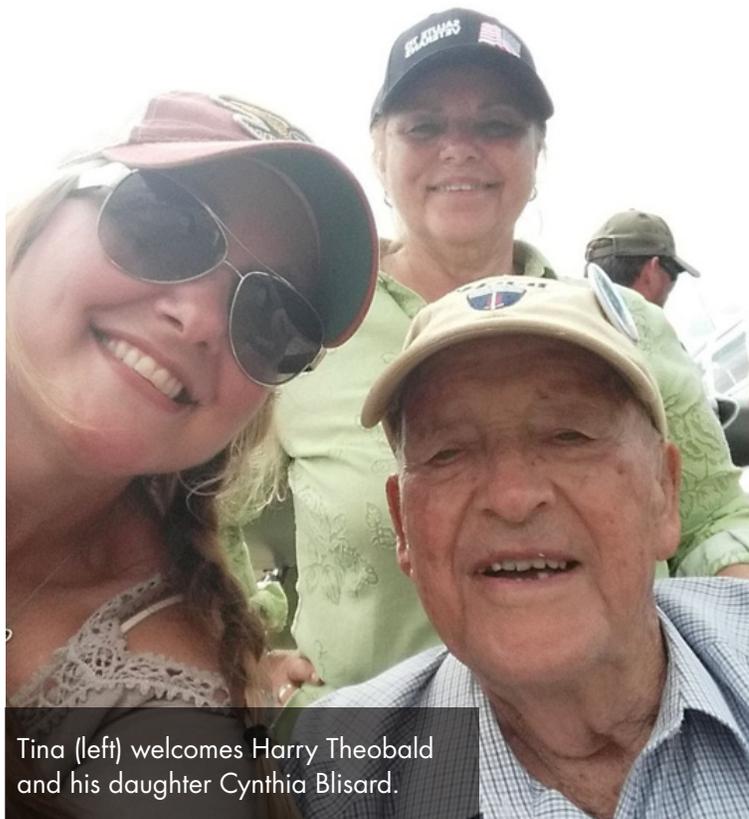


Harry Theobald

A woman wheeled an elderly man up to Lope's Hope 3rd in a wheelchair and introduced herself as Cythia Blisard and her father as Harry Theobald.

Harry came to Oshkosh specifically to see B-17s, B-24s, and P-51s. While he didn't get to see a B-24, he was more than happy with the Mustang turnout. The bombers were important to Harry because he was a tailgunner, with 15 missions in B-24s, and 19 missions in B-17s. When I asked him about his interest in the Mustang he replied "Once the Mustangs arrived and could escort us all the way to the target, we didn't see German fighters anymore. Those P-51 pilots saved my life." Later on, EAA Warbirds, Dakota Territory Air Museum, and AirCorps folks helped make sure that Harry met a current B-17 crew and two WWII veteran pilots, Dick Cole and P-51 pilot Bud Anderson.

Meeting members of the greatest generation, and doing everything we can to honor them and helping them enjoy their airshow time is the best part of the Oshkosh experience!



Tina (left) welcomes Harry Theobald and his daughter Cynthia Blisard.



Eric and Chuck listen raptly to Harry Theobald tell his story.



Heather Penney



Another very special guest was Major Heather Penney.



Doug Birkey, Heather Penney, Tina Moore and Chuck Cravens with Lope's Hope 3rd.



Warbirds Banquet

After 6 days of displaying Lope's Hope 3rd and sharing Don Lopez and his P-51C's history, it was time to attend the EAA Warbirds banquet.



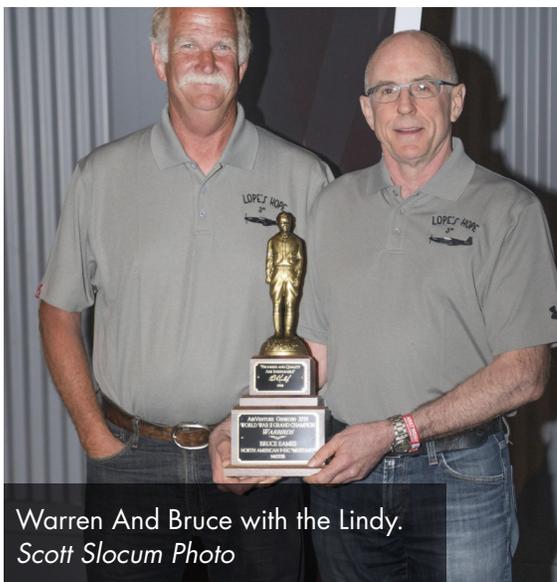
Bernie Vasquez, Bruce Eames and Scott Slocum enjoying the banquet.



After much anticipation the winners were announced. Lope's Hope 3rd was the Warbird Grand Champion. Bruce holds the Grand Champion Warbird Trophy and Erik has the Golden Wrench award for AirCorps Aviation. *Scott Slocum Photo*



Warren and Bruce with the trophy. They might be saying, "pretty cool!", at least I would be. *Scott Slocum photo.*



Warren And Bruce with the Lindy. *Scott Slocum Photo*

(right) Dakota Territory Air Museum's guys proudly display the Grand Champion Warbird trophy, from left, Warren Pietsch, Bruce Eames and Bernie Vasquez. *Scott Slocum photo*





The Golden Wrench plaque awarded to AirCorps for Lope's Hope 3rd.



The AirCorps team and the Dakota Territory Air Museum gathered for a photo after the banquet. *Scott Slocum Photo*