

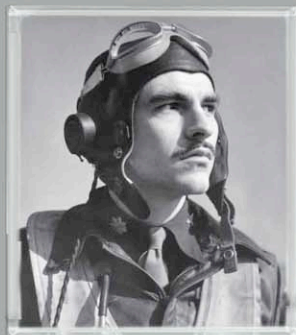
AMERICAN COMBAT AIRMAN

HALL OF FAME



Major George Preddy, USAAF

Major George Preddy was arguably one of the greatest fighter pilots of the Second World War. He was a small, slight, soft-spoken North Carolinian whose career was tragically cut short on Christmas Day, 1944, when his P-51 Mustang was shot down by friendly fire. At the time of his death he was the leading Mustang ace in the European Theater of Operations (ETO) with 26 air victories. General John C. Meyer, Preddy's commanding officer and an ace himself, said of Preddy "I have never met a man of such intense desire to excel...George Preddy was the complete fighter pilot."



Born February 5, 1919, Preddy grew up in Greensboro, North Carolina. Preddy learned to fly before the war and, like Charles Lindbergh, he traveled the country as a barnstormer. Early in 1940, he tried to join the Navy but was rejected due to minor physical problems. In the summer of 1940 he turned to the Army Air Corps and passed all the necessary tests, but was told he would have to wait for an opening in the

aviation cadet program. In April 1941 he reported to flight training, and, in December 1941, he found himself in Australia, as a part of the 49th Pursuit Group, flying P-40 Warhawks.



Major Preddy Poses with his P-51 "Cripes A'Mighty"

In six months of flying in defense of Australia, Preddy managed to claim two Japanese airplanes damaged. In July 1942, he was involved in a mid-air collision that left him hospitalized for several months. After recovering from his injuries and after some time back in the United States, he wrangled an assignment with the 487th Fighter Squadron, 352nd Fighter Group, a group soon to be known throughout the European Theater of Operations as the "Blue-Nosed Bastards of Bodney." Preddy flew his first mission with the 352nd in September 1943.

From September 1943, until August 1944, Preddy amassed more than four hundred combat hours, two hundred more than a normal tour for a fighter pilot. His most memorable mission occurred on August 6, 1944, when Preddy led the 352nd on an escort mission over Germany. With the aggressiveness that was the hallmark of a successful fighter pilot, Preddy led his flight into a gaggle of more than thirty German fighters. Flying his Mustang

named "Cripes A'Mighty," Preddy shot down six enemy airplanes, this mission earning him the Distinguished Service Cross and an unwanted return to the United States. Preddy requested a return to combat, and in October of 1944 he returned as commanding officer of the 328th Fighter Squadron of the 352nd Fighter Group.

On Christmas Day, 1944, Preddy led a patrol of ten Mustangs from a temporary base at Asch, Belgium. In poor weather, Preddy's group was vectored to a formation of enemy planes, and in the ensuing fight, Preddy downed two more Bf-109s. He and his wingman, joined by a third Mustang from another group, were then vectored to an unknown number of bandits near Liege. Preddy saw an FW-190 on the deck and went after him at treetop height. As they roared over American ground troops, Preddy was hit by friendly ground fire and crashed to his death. He was twenty-five years old.



Preddy Receives the Distinguished Service Cross.

Among Preddy's decorations are the Distinguished Service Cross, Silver Star with Oak Leaf Cluster, Distinguished Flying Cross with eight Oak Leaf Clusters, the Air Medal with seven Oak Leaf Clusters, Purple Heart (posthumous) and the Belgian Croix de Guerre (posthumous).