

Brig Gen Charles W. Koenig



Brigadier General Charles W. Koenig, a World War II fighter pilot ACE, joined the Army Air Force as an aviation cadet from Oakland, California. Upon graduation from flight training on September 29, 1942, he pinned on his gold Second Lieutenant bars and silver Pilot wings and proceeded to advanced fighter pilot training. After advanced training he was assigned to the newly formed 354th Fighter Group's 353rd Fighter Squadron, destined to become the most successful fighter unit in the European theater.

On October 20, 1943, the group deployed to England and was assigned to the 9th Air Force. 1st Lt Koenig was now twenty four years old with 400 hours flying time. Flying a P-51B Mustang while escorting heavy bombers over Northheim, Germany, he scored his first victory, a Messerschmitt 209, on February 12, 1944. On May 8th on

another escort mission to Steinhuder Lakes in northwest Germany, he attacked two Messerschmitt 109s and claimed one destroyed and the other damaged.

Re-equipping with the new P-51D with bubble canopy, improved gun sight and 50% more fire power had started prior to D Day. The 354th §, known as the "Pioneer Mustang Group" began moving into a recently captured airfield at Criqueville in Normandy only 8 days after the June 6th invasion, initially a scant 10 miles from the battlefield. Flying the new Mustang he named "Little Horse", General Koenig shared in the destruction of a Messerschmitt 109 on June 22. Then, near Perdreauville, France, on July 7th, he shot down a Focke-Wulf 190 and 30 days later a Messerschmitt 109 at Mayenne, France. On August 16, 1944, near Maintenon, France, he attacked four Focke-Wulf 190s, claiming two destroyed, one probable and one damaged, making him an ACE.



World War II Combat Record:

ACE with 6½ confirmed victories; 1 probable; 2 damaged. §

Returning from overseas with the rank of Captain, he attended an Air Officers course at the Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, from August to October 1945. Then, with the hostilities of war ended, he was released from active duty.



In 1948, General Koenig joined the P-51D equipped 61st Fighter Wing of the California Air National Guard flying from Oakland, California. In 1954, as a Major, he moved to the newly

forming and C-46 equipped 129th Air Resupply Group (later designated as the 129th Special Operations Group) at Hayward, California. He would serve as the group's operations officer from 1954 to 1958, and as its commander from 1958 to 1974, and attain the rank of Colonel. Aircraft flown during his 20 year tenure with the 129th were the C-46 "Commando"; the HU-16 "Albatross"; the C-119 "Flying Boxcar"; and the U10 "Helio Courier".

Under his command, the 129th earned The Air Force Outstanding Unit award after the group's participation in flood relief operations in northern California during the winter of 1964/65. During this operation, over half a million pounds of supplies were delivered to the stricken areas by the unit's C-119 crews in bad weather without accident or serious incident. The Assembly of the State of California also passed a Resolution commending his group.

The many decorations he wore below his Command Pilot Wings included: the Distinguished Service Cross; the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with 12 oak leaf clusters. Also while flying with the "Pioneer Mustang Group", the group earned Two Distinguished Unit Citations and the French Croix de Guerre with Palm.

In 1974 General Koenig left the 129th for a position in the California State Adjutant General's office and was promoted to Brigadier General. Sadly, in 1976, he would lose his final combat - a battle with cancer. His military legacy is now carried on by his sons, Col Charles W. Koenig and Lt Col Robert Koenig.

§ The title ACE is bestowed on Fighter pilots with a minimum of 5 aerial combat victories.

War record source : [American Fighter Aces Association](#)

The 354th Fighter Group was the first group in the European theater to be equipped with the North American P-51 "Mustang" fighter.



A fully restored and flying P-51D bearing "Little Horse" nose art, tail number, and D-Day paint. Restored and currently owned and flown by Paul Ehlen of Bloomington, MN.

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The 353rd Fighter Sq Pilots board, circa 1944. With 21 ACEs, the most successful Fighter Sq. in the Army Air Corps, the 21 ACEs include three triple ACEs and four double ACEs. 1st Lt Koenig, became an ACE flying "Little Horse", is in C Flight, 1st row, 4th from the left.

