

Brig Gen Albert R. Santos



Brigadier General Albert R. Santos was born February 23 1918 in San Jose, California. He grew up on the family farm in the Santa Clara Valley. In 1939 he received his first flight instruction at Progressive Air Service, Mountain View, California, and soloed in the 35 horsepower Aerocinn Collegiate. He would trade tractor fuel for flying time in a Fleet biplane.

Initially drafted into the Army Signal Corps, and transferred to the Army Air Corps in February 1942. He completed Primary training flying the PT-13 & 17 at Avon Park, Florida. Basic training followed in the BT-13 at Shaw Field, Sumpter, South Carolina. Advanced training in the AT-6 was at Spence Field, Moultrie, Georgia. Upon graduation, January 14, 1943, he received his pilot's wings and was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant.

The first assignment for 2nd Lieutenant Santos was with the 88th Dive Bomb Squadron, Key Field, Meridian, Mississippi. There he flew the attack version of the North American P-51A Mustang, the A36. He was then transferred to the 514th Fighter Bomber Squadron at Congrarre Army Air Field, South Carolina. Here he continued his fighter pilot training flying the P-39Q, Bell Air Cobra. Another transfer to the 57th Fighter Squadron, and then to the 439th Fighter Squadron in Florida, would put him back in the cockpit of the P-51A & B Mustang, the aircraft he would later fly in combat.



In February 1944, he was sent to 8th Air Force in England. There he was stationed at Air Force Station F-345 at Goxhill, and then transferred to the 355th Fighter Group (The White Spinner Group), 358th Fighter Squadron, stationed at Air Force Station F-122, Steeple Morden, 40 miles north of London. During this assignment he would log 320 flying hours on 66 combat missions in P-51 B "Lois Carolyn" & D "Lois Carolyn II". He would end his overseas tour where he had started, at Goxhill, but now as an instructor pilot teaching fighter tactics in the Mustang.

Returning to the United States in January 1945, the now Captain Santos, was assigned to the 3022nd Fighter Squadron at Las Vegas and Indian Springs Auxiliary Air Fields. There he flew the P-39 Air Cobra and the P-63 King Cobras. He also flew the RP-63 armor plated King Cobra. This aircraft was employed using the latest combat learned techniques to train B-17 aerial gunners before they were sent overseas. With the rank of Captain, his World War II service ended in May 1945.

In 1948 he joined the California Air National Guard's 61st Fighter Wing, later re-designated the 144th Fighter Wing. The P-51D's of the Wing's 194th Fighter Squadron

were based at Oakland airport. When the wing moved in 1951 to its new home at Hayward airport, the now Major Santos was its Operations officer. When the Fighter Wing moved in 1954 to Fresno, he elected to stay at Hayward with the newly formed 129th Air Resupply Group. He would later command the Group's 129th Air Resupply Squadron. The 129th Air Resupply Group would later become the 129th Special Operations Group. In 1974, he would become the Group Commander and received a promotion to Colonel.

Shortly after he assumed his command, the Group's mission was changed to Air Force Rescue and was re-designated as the 129th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group. After seeing the unit through its training and attaining Combat ready status, he was assigned in 1977 to Headquarters California Air National Guard as Deputy Commander. He was then promoted to Brigadier General. While with the 129th, General Santos had flown the C-46, HU-16, C-119, U-10, and the HC-130 Rescue Hercules. After thirty six years of military service, he retired in 1978.

During his long and distinguished career the General had flown twenty five types of military aircraft, single and multi-engine, land and sea, from piston powered to turbo-props to jets. He celebrated turning 70 by breaking the sound barrier in the back seat of an F-4. In addition to General Santos's Command Pilot wings, awarded in 1955, are 21 Military Decorations received from a grateful nation. Notable among them are the Silver Star, the Distinguished Flying Cross with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Legion of Merit, the Air Medal with 3 Oak Leaf Clusters, and the Air Force Commendation Medal.

On May 14 2007, at the age of 89, General Santos passed away after living a very full life. He was laid to rest with full military honors at the Alta Mesa Cemetery in Palo Alto, California.



Above - 1st Lt Al Santos's P-51 D "Lois Carolyn II" Steeple Morden, England

Below - 358th Fighter Squadron pilots - 1st Lt Santos , Standing 3rd from left, circa 1944

