Flying a Mustang Fighter Is Like Riding 2,000 Broncs

Col. Philip P. Ardery, former counsel for the Statewide Association and veteran of many bomber strikes over Europe, is back in the cockpit as commander of the 123rd Fighter Group, formerly the Kentucky Air National Guard. His check-out experiences in a "hot ship" is thrilling reading. He'll write more later.

Dear Friends:

I just happen to be thumbing through the last issue of the Co-op News, and thinking of what is going on in the big outside civilian world. I told Jimmie Smith I wanted to write you but feared you might not be interested in what I'm doing. He says I'm crazy. After all you are still supporting me, you know. Your tax dollars have bought and paid for my air force, so I guess it isn't strange that you might want to know something about it.

As I think about it, I rock back and forth in my swivel chair and look out the window. A string of four F-51 "Mustang" fighters are wheeling in the traffic pattern. Their long noses and little wings make them look like a flight of teal against the grey fall sky, and the angry sound of their 12 cylinder Rolls-Royce in-line engines sends a pleasing little shiver down my spine. Maybe they are beginning to be obsolete, but they are gallant fighters and certainly have turned in a great account for themselves in Korea. Perhaps you would like my impressions the first time I checked out in one.

It was in Kissimmee, Florida, in the fall of 1944. I had just come back from overseas—a bomber pilot, like always, dying to fly fighters. I remember reading all the complicated technical orders required and taking a "cockpit check." The thing that makes a bomber pilot uneasy about this procedure is that it's a simple matter of get in and fly it. It's only got one seat, and you either do or you don't the first try and there's nobody there to help you. As I walked out to the palmetto-fringed concrete "hardstand" where the ship was parked, I was trying to remember each detail of the cockpit check I'd taken the day before. I felt awkward. I threw my chute up on the wing and spoke to the crew chief standing by.

"What's the trick to landing it?"

The crew chief looked a little puzzled, and then seeing I was making a checkout, said: "No trick, sir. Just remember she's a Mustang. Don't let her get away from you. There. See what I mean?"

He nodded toward a 51 just settling down on the runway. Its landing gear looked ridiculously long, and the flaps fanned out behind like the tail of a nightshirt. The wheels touched, then bounced. The whole ship rocked violently from side to side and slithered along the runway for almost a thousand feet, the pilot obviously busy digging the spurs.

"She's a Mustang!" The mechanic repeated.

I put on my chute and climbed in. I would find out.

Nervously I checked my cockpit procedures: brakes locked, controls unlocked, shoulder harness and safety belt fastened, gas tanks checked, master switch on, radio on, booster pump on, etc. etc.

I touched the starter switch and the big four-bladed prop hesitantly kicked over two compression strokes and caught. A moment later the crew chief backed away from the sputtering plane and nodded the nod that means "wheel chocks out." I was on my own.

A few minutes later after going through another engine check, I looked down the long runway and slowly opened the throttle wide. It seemed to me the throttle would never bump the post. Seconds after I thought it should have the "full needle" the power was still increasing. Already, this diminutive Mustang was determined to take over and go bucking off to the left of the runway.

I countered the torque of the engine with a grotesque amount of right rudder and then felt the ship get lighter and lighter until it was airborne. I pulled up the gear and flipped the coolant door switch to "automatic." A few seconds later as the airspeed indicator passed 250, I felt like a man riding two thousand horses bareback. Not much like a bomber—you seem to ride *on* this thing, not *in* it, I noted.

High up the sky was blue. Creamy little balls of cumulus floated lower at about three thousand. I wandered through the columns of fleece on up to twelve thousand feet and leveled off.

There I trimmed the ship to fly straight and level setting the throttle at thirty-five inches of manifold pressure and the prop at 2400 rpm and started racking the ship around in some steep turns. I looked down and saw I was just over the field. Then the self-conscious idea hit me that the crew chief might be standing down there watching me. "Stop flying it like a bomber!" I told myself. Should I? Well, it's been a long time, I thought, but I'll try . . .

I dived a little, pulled the nose through the horizon and rolled slowly over, over, over—past the verticle bank and yet farther until I felt the pressure of the seat belt in the pit of my stomach. I bent my head straight back and looked. Sure enough there was the horizon. I had to look way up to see it, and I was pushing the stick hard forward to keep the nose level. For a few seconds I held it, keeping the wings level with the horizon, and then rolled it out.

For twenty or thirty minutes I "wrung it out" and then nosed down toward the traffic pattern. I kept my speed to a safe 150 through the final turn into the field, and then slowed down a little on approach. As she touched down and quit flying I felt her take the bit in her teeth. Of all the bucking and raring and runway jumping I ever saw there was never anything like it.

When I cut the engine in the parking stand the crew chief smiled. "How was it?" he asked.

"It's a Mustang" I replied.

Next time, if you're interested, I'll have a word about the gunnery training we're beginning. Next week I go to Florida for two weeks firing out over the gulf.

—Good Luck, Phil Ardery.

Shooting Important As Flying in Air Corps

U. S. Air Force Colonel Philip P. Ardery, former counsel for the Statewide and veteran of many bomber

strikes over Europe during World War Two, is once again flying high as commander of the 123rd Fighter Group, formerly the Kentucky Air National Guard. In this, one of a series of letters to his Rural Electric Co-op friends, Col. Ardery relates the thrilling details of aerial gunnery.

Dear Friends:

This month I'd like to expand somewhat the subject of flying which I raised in my last letter. I want to say a little about the particular role of the tactical fighter branch of the Air Force. Naturally the accomplishment of this role is not simply a matter of flying. We must fly and we must shoot. And when we shoot we must hit something. If we don't hit what we shoot at we might as well stay on the ground.

A little more than a week ago I spent several days in Florida devoting myself to this business of learning to shoot so as to be able to hit something. Our gunnery training was carried on at one of the satellite airdromes of Eglin Air Force Base. Eglin is on the gulf coast near Pensacola, Florida, only about an hour and forty-five minutes—as the Mustang flies—due south of our home base at Ft. Knox.

Here's How

If I can, I want to tell you about one of our missions in a manner that makes some sense. I hope all of you will understand a little of the technique whether you've ever flown or not.

The morning of my first mission started out cool and crisp with the promise of ripening into the kind of weather that makes Florida famous. When I arrived at the operations shack the pilots of my flight were huddled around a blackboard in the midst of a great pile of chutes, oxygen masks, helmets, Mae West life vests, and other flying paraphernalia. The operations officer was trying to talk above the roar of engines warming up on the ramp.

I was to be "easy red leader," my flight being the "easy red flight." The tow ship which pulled the target for us was "easy red tow." I gave the boys a time check to synchronize our watches and told them to start engines in twenty minutes and stand by for a radio check-in.

Twenty-five minutes later we were parked just off the end of the runway watching the Mustang we called "easy red tow" laboriously drag about six hundred feet of cable and a ground hugging twenty foot panel target off the ground.

Take Off

As soon as the tow ship was airborne the tower cleared "easy red flight" to take off. In two elements of two ships each we took off, raised our gear and headed south in a long sweeping left turn. My second element joined up as I headed the flight toward the blue fringe of gulf and started a climb to eight thousand feet.

Our base at Eglin is set down in the piney woods and sand in a hunter's and fisherman's paradise. It is commonplace to see deer running across the roads of the neighborhood or as occasional intruders right on the airbase. As I looked down I saw the beach directly beneath me.

Tow Ready

Out over the water I could see "easy red tow," somewhat obscured by the haze, making a wide turn down the coastline about three miles offshore. It was too distant for me to make out the panel target he was pulling.

I was thinking about making lots of green holes in that target. Why green, you ask? Its part of the system. We paint the bullets of three of the ships, green, blue and red. The fourth ship carries unpainted ammunition. The paint is scarcely dry when the ammo is loaded and when the bullets go through the panel they leave the color of their identity. Thus each pilot can be scored for hits. Each of us carried two hundred rounds, and fired only two of his six guns. So I hoped to get as many green holes out of my two hundred as possible.

As "easy red tow" straightened out heading south, directly parallel with the coast line, I got a call.

"Red leader from red tow."

"Go ahead, red tow," I answered.

"On course, ready to fire, begin your runs."

"Roger—we'll make the first run in a couple of minutes."

Signalled

I dipped my left wing signalling left echelon to the flight. I looked back and saw my number two man leave his position on my right and slide back under behind me to reappear on the end of the planes to my lower left. We climbed to a position nearly abreast of the tow ship but high and to the

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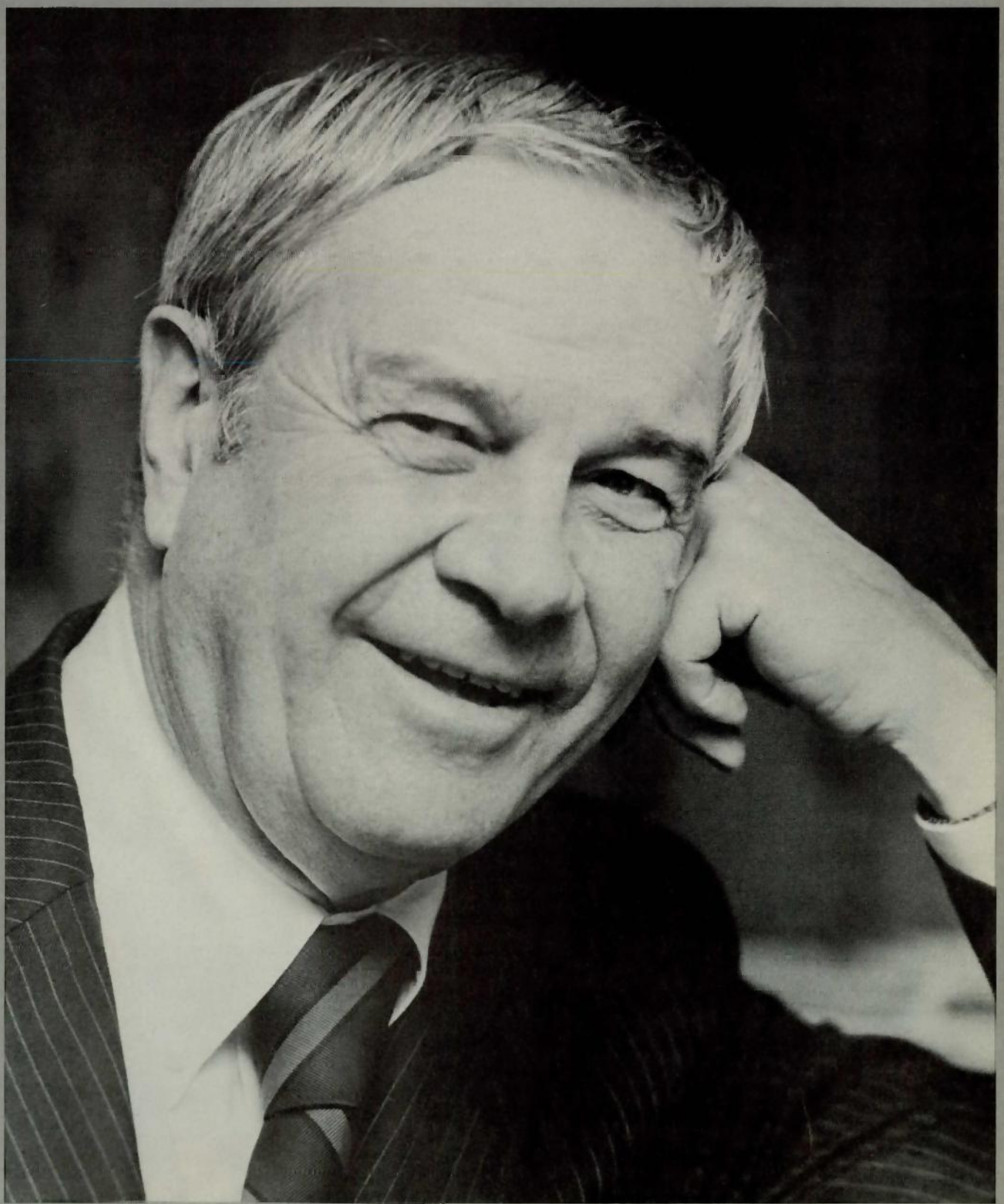
Bomber Pilot



Attorney and widely-known Kentuckian, Philip P. Ardery, participated in and provided commitment and leaderhip to the development of rural electrification in the State. He has been recognized extensively for his wholehearted involvement in the many legal battles that marked the early years of rural electrification.

Now, Phil Ardery will be widely recognized for a different reason. A newly-told story is coming to the bookshelves that tells of Phil's involvement in the deadly and fear-filled battles of World War II. The title of Phil's book is **Bomber Pilot.**

For thirty years, the manuscript for Phil's book rested on the shelf, waiting for the time for publication. In mid-November, the University Press of Kentucky at Lexington released the story.

It occurred during those fateful war years from 1940 to 1944. Phil was a B-24 bomber squadron commander, then group and later wing operations officer in the Eighth Air Force. He flew on the famous Ploesti raid and was in the great D-Day Armada that was the massive allied plunge for victory — along with many other hazardous missions.

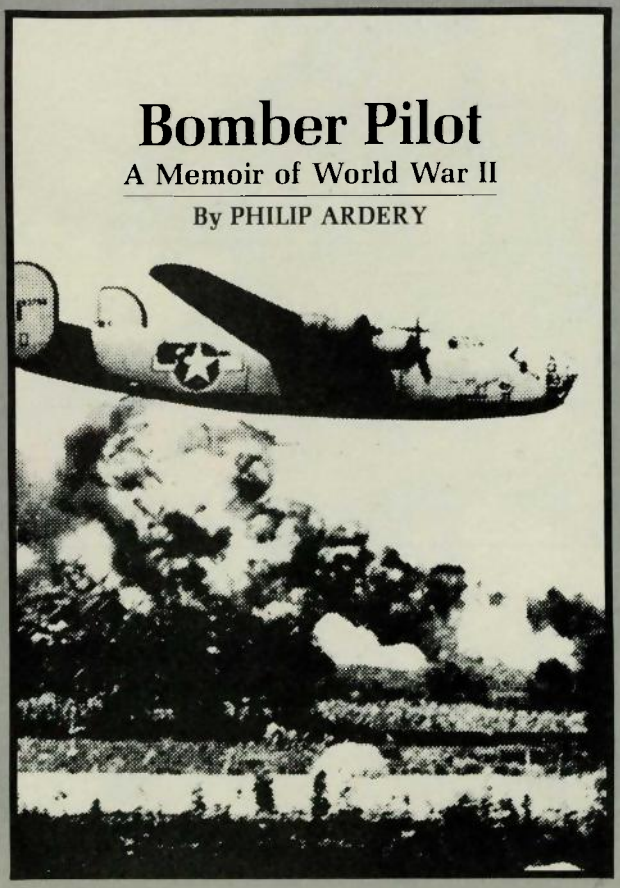
General Russell E. Dougherty, recently retired as four-star commander of the Strategic Air Command comments that, "His (Phil's) intensely personal memories of his years as a bomber pilot and combat commander will strike responsive chords in the minds of thousands. . ."

Kentuckians have known Phil more intimately — and owe a debt of gratitude to him — because of his work in stubbornly pursuing the cause of rural electrification. In 1946, about two years after his military duty, he was interviewed by a committee of the newly-formed Kentucky Rural Electric Cooperative Corporation (now KAEC). The young Frankfort, Kentucky lawyer was selected to represent the fledgling, struggling cooperatives in their many ensuing legal struggles to maturity. That selection committee was made up of William C. Dale, Manager of Shelby REC, chairman; Guy Bridwell of Harrison REC; Emmett Withers of Farmers REC, and Elvin Langford of Inter-County REC. Many Kentuckians know or remember these Kentucky leaders.

Phil, Bill Dale, Elvin Langford and J. K. Smith, then the manager of the newly-formed state association, met in the office of the secretary of the Kentucky Public Service Commission on January 17, 1950, to file the first application ever filed by an electric cooperative for a generating station and related transmission system. After two and a half years of legal battles, the courts affirmed the application. A hard-fought victory.

Many other legal involvements on behalf of the electric cooperatives followed. The most memorable event, however, according to Phil, occurred on August 29, 1950. "I was on the platform at the Shelby REC annual meeting with Manager Bill Dale. The meeting was less than halfway through when Bill fell ill and turned the microphone over to me. I finished up the meeting and went to the Shelby hospital to find Bill under an oxygen tent, dying." At the next meeting of the East Kentucky Rural Electric Cooperative, a resolution was passed naming East Kentucky's first generating plant at Ford on the Kentucky River, the William C. Dale Station.

As for Phil Ardery's book, **Bomber Pilot, A Memoir of World War II,** it is a graphic story of people whose daily daring and heroism were the essence of total victory. Phil Ardery's solid and down-to-earth description of it all, authentic because of his having been so deeply involved, makes his memoirs important (and exciting) reading. Its story is of the realities of our air war and those who made it happen. Not "just another war story," **Bomber Pilot** has the suspense and feeling of fiction — with the intimacy and involvement of the man who lived it . . . and lived to tell about it.



(See Advertisement on page 31)