

## **STRAIGHT DOWN**

### **THE NORTH AMERICAN A-36 DIVE-BOMBER IN ACTION**

**Peter C Smith**

For the first time the amazing story of the North American A-36 dive-bombers (converted Mustangs) is told in full. The adoption by the USAAF in 1941 of the dive-bomber is little known. It was largely brought about by one man, General George C Marshall, then the Chief of Staff, following the stunning success of the German Junkers Ju 87 Stuka in the defeats of Poland, France and Greece. Army co-operation and close air support were in their infancy in the USA and dive-bombing seemed to be the answer.

The trouble was the US Army had no dive-bombers and the hunt was on to find a suitable aircraft to suit the bill. It needed to be fast as well as accurate. The answer came from a surprising source. The North American Company was building the Mustang fighter for the RAF at the time, but orders had dried up. Inspired, the Mustang was fitted with dive brakes from the new Vultee Vengeance dive-bomber, also being developed for the RAF. The result was a sleek, aerodynamic aircraft, able to dive vertically with a good bomb load – the perfect answer to the problem.

This fine dive-bomber was sent up to equip three USAAF Groups and it served with great distinction in Sicily and Italy and in Burma and China, setting up an enviable sortie rate and a high profile accuracy. It also showed the way for the adaptation of the standard P-51 Mustang fighter for dive-bombing and close support. The RAF also utilised the A-36 in the dangerous low-level reconnaissance role during the Mediterranean campaign.

*Straight Down!* is a comprehensive account of the development of the A-36. It is profusely illustrated with over 100 original photographs and contains dramatic eye-witness accounts from the pilots of 27th and 86th Fighter-Bomber Squadrons.

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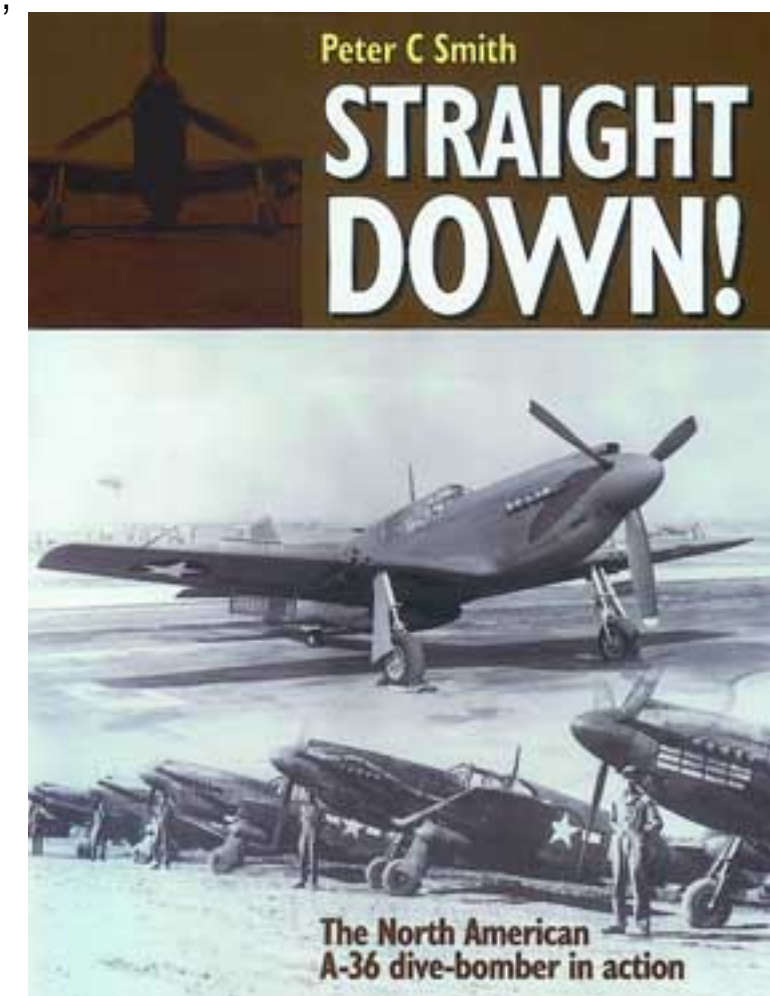
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