

OPERATION BERLIN EXPRESS

EVER WONDER WHAT IT WOULD
BE LIKE TO FLY A P-51 ACROSS THE
NORTH ATLANTIC? LEE LAUDERBACK
GIVES US THE INSIDE LOOK
AT A COMPLEX
MISSION

BY MICHAEL O'LEARY



Day One: The start of the mission. Lee Lauderback gives *Berlin Express* one final check before strapping into the cockpit for the first leg of Operation *Berlin Express*. The flight to Kentucky would also be the longest leg. (The Friedkin Group)

The North Atlantic. Looking out the left window of a Boeing 787 cruising at 41,000-ft, you can't see it because of the undercast. Yet, you know it's there — an unimaginably huge mass of roiling black-gray water clawing at the shores of North America, the British Isles, and Europe. The North Atlantic holds its secrets. Somewhere below us sits the *Titanic* as

well as thousands of other ships that have been swallowed over the centuries. Coming to more recent times, the deep bottom also holds the corroding remains of hundreds of aircraft — many lost with their crews while trying to fortify Britain in its hour of need. Through an occasional break in the undercast, from the comfortable 787 cabin you can see the heav-

ing waters — sprinkled with ice — and the sirens of the North Atlantic beckon — “Come lower. Come see us. We have many things to show you.”

We now take crossing the North Atlantic as an everyday event, but that does not negate the fact that the North

Atlantic is as dangerous and as hostile as it has ever been. The North Atlantic does not view humanities' interests with much compassion.

That brings us to Operation *Berlin Express*.

Simply put, this was an operation initiated to fly a North American Mustang to Britain to take part in 2017's famed Flying Legends Airshow held at historic

Duxford Airfield, just below Cambridge.

When Britain declared war on Germany in September 1939, the Royal Air Force was re-equipping with newer aircraft, but not fast enough to counter the German *blitzkrieg* rolling through Europe.

America, at the time, was maintaining a position of neutrality but the government, after difficult negotiating, honored

Britain's numerous requests to purchase armaments — as long as they paid upfront in gold.

One of the American aircraft ordered in quantity was the Lockheed Hudson — a sturdy and dependable light bomber/reconnaissance twin-engine aircraft. Based on the company's civil