

Preddy, George Earl, Jr. ^[1]

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by Samuel L. Sox, Jr., 1994

5 Feb. 1919–25 Dec. 1944

George Earl Preddy, Jr., army Air Corps officer and highest ranking P-51 Mustang ace of [World War II](#) ^[2], was born in [Greensboro](#) ^[3], the son of George E., a railroad man employed by the [Southern Railway](#) ^[4], and Clara Noah Preddy. He was graduated from Greensboro High School at age sixteen by doubling up on his courses. Due to his small stature (5' 9", 125 lbs.), his desire to participate in sports was thwarted, but he took satisfaction in operating a concession stand, known as "The Mouse Hole," near the War Memorial Stadium in Greensboro. The year following his high school graduation, he worked in a cotton mill to pay his way to [Guilford College](#) ^[5], which he attended for two years. During this period he developed a yearning to fly and soloed in 1938 from a dirt strip at Vandalia; he spent the next two years barnstorming the state with his instructor, Bill Teague, also of Greensboro.

At age twenty he tried twice to enlist in the U.S. Naval Cadets but was rejected because of a curvature of the spine, his small size, and high blood pressure. He subsequently passed the enlistment requirements of the Army Air Corps in September 1940 but was told that all classes were filled. On the advice of the Air Corps he joined the [National Guard](#) ^[6] and completed basic training at Fort Moultrie, S.C. Preddy received orders in April 1941 to report for primary flying school at Darr Aero Tech, Albany, Ga. He received his pilot's license and a commission as a second lieutenant at Craig Field, Ala., on 12 Dec. 1941. On the twenty-fourth he was assigned to the Forty-ninth Pursuit Group, Ninth Pursuit Squadron, with which he served for eight months in Darwin, Australia. The Forty-ninth flew Curtiss P-40s. Preddy named his first aircraft "Tar Heel" and flew it until he was hospitalized for four months after a midair collision on 12 July 1942. During this tour he had several encounters with Japanese aircraft but scored no victories.

On his release from the hospital, he was promoted to first lieutenant and shipped back to the United States, where he was assigned to the 352d Fighter Group, equipped with Republic P-47s. Preddy was promoted to captain on 5 Mar. 1943 and four months later shipped to Bodney, England, the permanent base for the 352d. He flew his first mission against the Luftwaffe on 14 September and scored his first victory on 1 December—a ME-109. During the succeeding seventeen months he served in the European Theater of Operations (ETO) and was officially credited with 26.83 aerial and 5.00 ground victories, making him the highest ranking ace in the ETO until his untimely death on Christmas Day 1944. His biggest day came on 5 Aug. 1944 when he destroyed 6 ME-109s in a dogfight while approaching Berlin. For this feat, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. This record would be tied by another pilot in the ETO but never surpassed. Of the 31.83 victories Preddy scored, 29.83 were tallied while flying North American P-51s, each named "Crips 'A Mighty," one of his favorite expressions. On 28 Oct. 1944, following a thirty-day tour of the United States after his 6 August experience, he was made commanding officer of the 328th Fighter Squadron of the 352d Fighter Group.

On 23 Dec. 1944 his Fighter Group was transferred to the Continent to be based at Asch, Belgium. On Christmas Day Preddy, now a major, and a fellow pilot, Lieutenant James G. Carter, were on patrol near Liège, where he destroyed two ME-109s, his final victories. He received a report of an enemy aircraft strafing the U.S. troops and went down to drive off the enemy fighter. As the two pilots closed in on the fleeing fighter, U.S. ground troops opened up on the enemy plane. Preddy and his wingman flew into the ground fire and his plane sustained hits. The major was fatally wounded but survived long enough to force-land his crippled fighter.

Preddy had flown his 143d mission, with over 532 total hours of exposure. For his unselfish devotion to his nation and expertise in the performance of his job, he was awarded the Silver Star with oak leaf cluster, the Air Medal with seven oak leaf clusters, Distinguished Service Cross, Distinguished Flying Cross with eight oak leaf clusters, and, posthumously, the Purple Heart and the Croix de Guerre by the government of Belgium. He was buried beside his brother, Lieutenant William R. Preddy, a fellow fighter pilot killed in action over Czechoslovakia on 17 Apr. 1945, in the U.S. military cemetery at Saint Avold, France.

Throughout his brief career George Preddy was noted for his willingness and his ability to assist new pilots to become as proficient as possible and to teach them how to survive. Of the many pilots who flew with him as wingmen, he lost only one. Contrary to the popular belief that most combat pilots were happy-go-lucky men, he was a very understanding and compassionate person, loved by all who served with him. Before he returned to duty following his thirty-day leave after his 6 Aug. 1944 mission, the Reverend E. H. Neece, pastor of West Market Street Methodist Church, Greensboro, asked him why he was returning to combat. Reportedly, Preddy replied:

Preacher, I must go back—
Back to do my part
Back to fly and give again
And I am not afraid

My plane may be shot away
But I shall not fall—
For I have wings—
Wings not of wood or steel or stuff
But wings of firmer kind—
Wings God gave my soul
Thank God for wings.

On 7 Dec. 1968 the city of Greensboro dedicated a portion of its southern interstate highway loop in memory of the Preddy brothers; the monument is inscribed: "This boulevard is named for Major George E. Preddy, Jr., and 1st Lt. William R. Preddy, Greensboro brothers who gave their lives for their country in World War II. *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.*"

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Additional Resources:

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"George Preddy." Preddy Memorial Foundation. <http://www.preddy-foundation.org/preddy-bios/george-preddy/> ^[9] (accessed September 24, 2014).

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[Video: George Preddy visits Greensboro, 1944], [Mss. Coll. 32. George Preddy Papers], Greensboro Historical Museum, Greensboro, NC, USA. 1944-48. <http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/ttt/id/37462/> ^[12] (accessed September 25, 2014).

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