

<http://web.archive.org/web/20050301065529/http://www.military.state.ky.us/kyngemus/mantell.htm>

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CAPTAIN THOMAS FRANCIS MANTELL JR.



CAPT. Thomas F. Mantell Jr. was born in Franklin, Kentucky, 30 June 1922. He was a graduate of Male High School, in Louisville. On 16 June 1942, he joined the Army Air Corps, graduating Flight School on 30 June 1943.

PHOTO AT RIGHT: Mantell (center)



with buddies at Army Air Corps Flight School, 1942.

During World War II, Mantell was assigned to the 440th Troop Carrier Group, 96th Troop Carrier Squadron, 9th Air Force. He was awarded Distinguished Flying Cross, and Air Medal w/3OLCs for heroism. Following the war he returned to Louisville, joining the newly organized Kentucky Air National Guard, as Flight Leader, "C" Flight, 165th Fighter Squadron, Kentucky Air National Guard on 16 February 1947.

PHOTO BELOW: Mantell (front row, second from the right) with pilots of the 165th Fighter Squadron, Kentucky Air National Guard.



PHOTO BELOW: P-51 Mustang of the Kentucky Air National Guard

Photo Missing

On 7 January 1948, while on a training flight with three other P-51Ds (Mustang) Mantell was directed by the flight tower at Godman Field to pursue an unidentified flying object. While in pursuit of the object, he died in plane crash near Franklin, Simpson County, Kentucky.

PHOTO BELOW: Mantell crash site



The story of Mantell's death while chasing a Unidentified Flying Object made headlines across the country and world. An intense military investigation of the incident became part of Project SIGN, which later became Project BLUEBOOK, the military's investigations into UFOs. Much speculation and conjecture has been written about this incident, it is still uncertain what Mantell was pursuing at the time of the crash. Mantell is the first flight casualty of the Kentucky Air National Guard. His remains were brought back to Louisville and buried at Zachary Taylor National Cemetery.

On Saturday, 29 September 2001, the Simpson County Historical Society unveiled a historical marker in honor of Thomas F. Mantell, Jr. The marker is located at the Franklin, Kentucky exit off Interstate 65, next to the office building of Simpson County Tourism.