

Pinball



In 1943, Bell extensively modified a P-63 Kingcobra to serve as a target for bomber gunner training. All weapons and interior armor were removed, thicker metal sheet replaced the skin, the canopy was armored to protect the pilot, and more than 100 microphones were buried in the skin. A light in the propeller hub—and, later, additional

lights around the rear fuselage—flashed each time the lead and plastic frangible training bullets hit the plane. A counter on the instrument panel recorded each hit. These aircraft became known as "Pinballs," and Bell built more than 300 of them. The end of World War II and the advent of the jet age brought the program to a halt.

Photo courtesy Jeffrey Eiben via Dana Bell