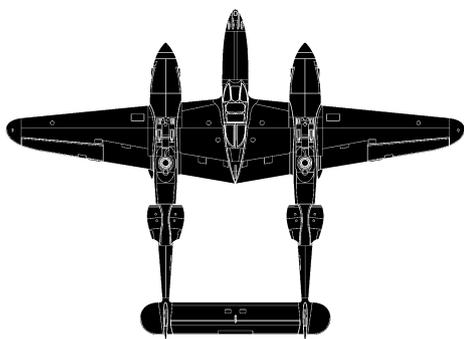


Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

P-38 Lightning



The P-38 Lightning was one of the more deadly of World War II's fighters. It was also one of the more distinctive; the airplane's twin-boom, central nacelle, tricycle-landing-gear design made it instantly recognizable. Beloved by its pilots, the Lightning went on to become one of the all-time greats.

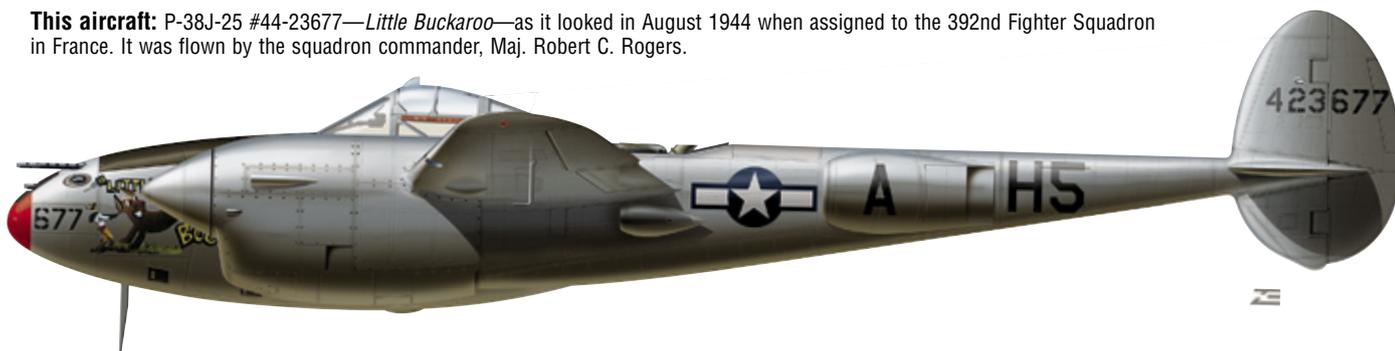
When the Air Corps called for an interceptor in 1937, Lockheed engineers knew they needed 2,000 horsepower to get desired speed and handling. Their solution was to use two 1,150 hp engines equipped with GE exhaust-driven turbo-superchargers. Originally designed as a high-altitude interceptor, the P-38 was more versatile than expected. It fought in every theater and performed in roles that ranged from air-to-air combat to dive bombing, level bombing, ground strafing, and photoreconnaissance. The P-38's range, agility, and enormous firepower

turned it into an "ace-maker" early in the war. While proficient enough in Europe and North Africa, the P-38 gained greatest fame in the Pacific. There, it was flown by USAAF's two top aces—Dick Bong and Tom McGuire. Moreover, Thirteenth Air Force P-38s pulled off the most famous ambush of World War II—the 1943 shootdown execution of Japanese military leader Adm. Isoroku Yamamoto in a daring, 500-mile, over-water raid.

The Lightning was an aircraft of exceptional capabilities; it pushed against the limits of performance and expanded US combat possibilities, especially in the Pacific. US pilots used those powers to great advantage, which is one reason that the P-38 was the only US fighter that was produced continuously from Pearl Harbor to V-J Day.

—Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: P-38J-25 #44-23677—*Little Buckaroo*—as it looked in August 1944 when assigned to the 392nd Fighter Squadron in France. It was flown by the squadron commander, Maj. Robert C. Rogers.



In Brief

Designed by Lockheed ★ built by Lockheed, Convair ★ first flight Jan. 27, 1939 ★ crew of one or two (P-38M only) ★ number built 10,038 ★ **Specific to P-38J:** two Allison V-1710 12-cyl engines ★ armament, one 20 mm cannon, four .50 cal machine guns, two 1,600 lb bombs ★ max speed 414 mph ★ cruise speed 290 mph ★ max range 450 mi ★ weight (loaded) 21,600 lb ★ span 52 ft ★ length 37 ft 10 in ★ height 9 ft 10 in.

Famous Fliers

Medal of Honor: Dick Bong, Tom McGuire. **Aces** (P-38 kills only): Bong (40), McGuire (38), Charles MacDonald (27), Jay Robbins (22), Gerald Johnson (20), Thomas Lynch (17), Bill Harris (16), Edward Cragg (15), Cyril Homer (15), Michael Brezas (12), William Leverette (11), Jack Ilfrey (8), Robin Olds (5)

Notables: Rex Barber, Tom Lanphier, and 14 other pilots in April 18, 1943 Yamamoto interception flight. **Others:** Jimmy Doolittle, Charles Lindbergh.

Interesting Facts

First US fighter to: destroy a German aircraft (1942), fly over Berlin (1944), land in Japan (1945) ★ solved torque problem with opposite-rotating propellers ★ "Lightning" bestowed by RAF ★ called "Fork-Tailed Devil" by Germans ★ appeared in the films "A Guy Named Joe" (1943), "Yamamoto Shot Down!" (1944), "Dick Bong: Pacific Ace" (1944) ★ led to F-4 and F-5 photorec variants ★ "made" more than 100 aces in the Pacific theater.



A P-38 in Chico, Calif., in 1944.