



P-38 Lightning Aces 1942-43 (Aircraft of the Aces)

John Stanaway

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The first P-38s became operational with the 1st Fighter Group in April 1941, and the initial combat deployments were made in Alaska, the Southwest Pacific and North Africa during the latter part of 1942. Photographic reconnaissance versions of the P-38 were in action even sooner when F-4 (P-38E) models were rushed to frontline units a few months after Pearl Harbor. Often using modified field measures to equip aircraft and train pilots in this demanding fighter, early pilots wrote a remarkable record of accomplishments that displayed a high degree of courage and innovation. Every theatre in which the United States was involved saw deployment of the P-38, and more than 60 Lightning pilots were credited with at least five victories by the end of 1943. Some of the early aces to be featured are photo-reconnaissance ace Karl Polifka, who supposedly scored some of the first unofficial P-38 aerial victories in the period April through August 1942, and 39th Fighter Squadron aces Charles King, Dick Bong and Hoyt Eason, who scored some of the first victories for the squadron. Some of the aces of the Mediterranean were 37th FS pilots Leverette, Wilkins and Hanna, who flew older G-models during the period when the celebrated Stuka shootdown took place in October 1943. New information and insight on this operation, including the identity of some of the German participants, is now available. New photos and details are available regarding CBI aces Bob Schultz, Hampton Boggs, Harry Sealy and others too.

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