

# Lockheed P-38L Lightning

1944

## General History

### Twice the Fighter

With four .50 caliber machine guns and a 20 mm cannon nestled in its nose, the P-38 had enough firepower to sink a ship. And, sometimes it did. A radical design, it was twice the size and had twice the power of any U.S. fighter when it first flew in 1939. It was fast too: "The Army's first 400-mile per hour fighter." The prototype shattered the transcontinental speed record on February 11, 1939, just fifteen days after its first flight. The new fighter was lost in a crash upon landing in New York but it was no matter, the Army had found a winner.

In combat, the *Lightning* was too big to be an adept dogfighter. It used its advantage in speed and firepower to tangle with the enemy. German pilots called it the "Fork-Tailed Devil." In the Pacific, P-38 *Lightnings* ambushed Japanese Admiral Yamamoto's plane, killing the architect of the attack on Pearl Harbor. America's highest scoring ace, Major Richard Bong, destroyed 40 Japanese planes with his *Lightning*.

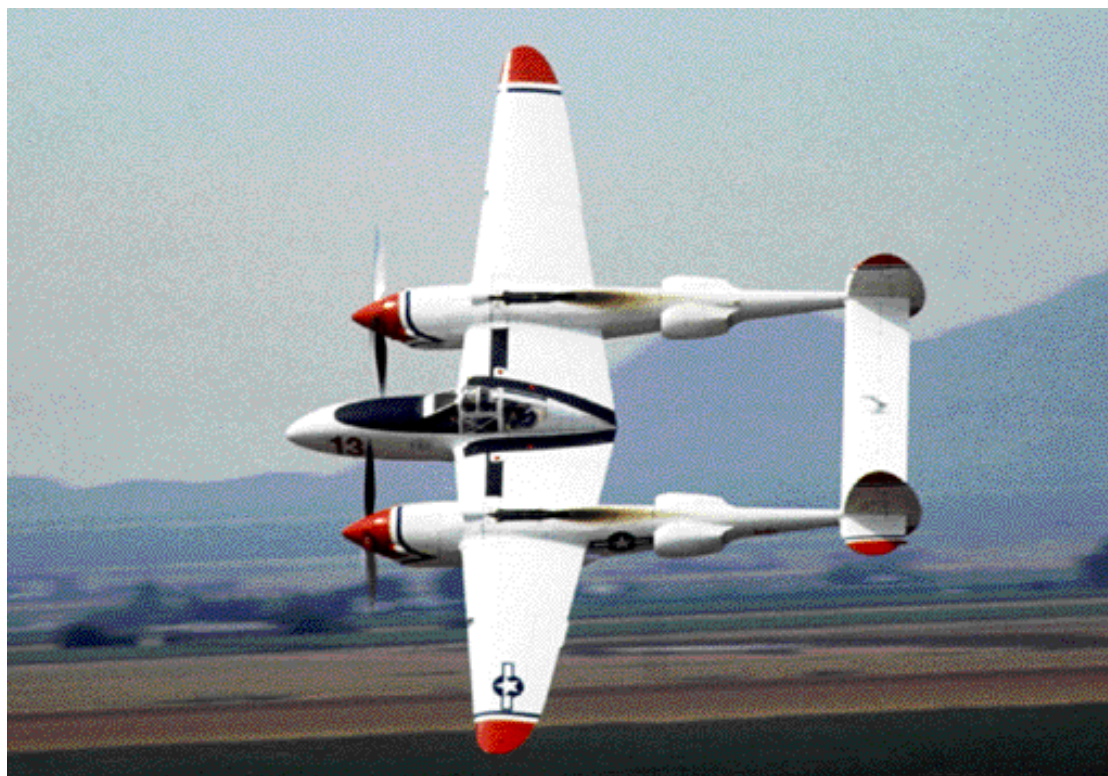
### Very Unconventional

The *Lightning* was unconventional in almost every way. Before the P-38, who'd ever heard of a U.S. fighter with two engines, twin booms, and tricycle landing gear? Designed by Clarence "Kelly" Johnson around two Allison engines, the P-38 had many advantages over single engine aircraft. It had concentrated firepower with all guns massed in the nose to hit hard at any range. The gyroscopic effects of two propellers turning in opposite directions cancelled each other out, producing no torque. P-38s often limped home with damage that would have most certainly brought down any single engine fighter.



## About This Aircraft

This P-38 was delivered to the U.S. Army Air Force near the end of World War II in July of 1945. It was promptly sent to Dallas, Texas to be converted into an F-5G photoreconnaissance aircraft. Transferred to Kelly Field in San Antonio, Texas, the little-used plane was soon declared "excess."



Delivered to surplus storage in Kingman, Arizona, the reconnaissance P-38 was sold to Kargl Aerial Surveys of Midland, Texas. From 1947 to 1952, the *Lightning* flew with Aero Exploration of Tulsa, Oklahoma, and then for Mark Hurd Mapping Company from 1952 to 1967. The *Lightning* was sold to Harrah's Club in 1967, and was displayed in Harrah's museum in Reno, Nevada. Purchased from Harrah's in 1985, the P-38 was returned to flyable form and ferried to England in 1989. The following year, Evergreen obtained the aircraft from Doug Arnold, and it again crossed the Atlantic.

Though in flyable condition, the P-38 was in need of a complete restoration. Since its "ground up" reconstruction, it is considered one of the finest examples of the classic Lockheed P-38 in the world.

This P-38 wears the paint scheme of Lt. Colonel Gerald Richard Johnson's *Lightning*. Born in Ohio, Johnson called Eugene, Oregon his hometown. He joined the Air Corps in 1941. While flying in Alaska with the 54th Pursuit Group in 1942, he shot down two Japanese aircraft.

Transferred to the Pacific with the 49th Fighter Group, Johnson promptly ran up a tally of eleven confirmed victories. After he was sent home, he requested to return to combat and shot down eleven more aircraft, bringing his total to 24 victories.

After the war, Johnson became commander of Atsugi Air Base near Tokyo. He and his co-pilot Jim Nolan were declared dead after their aircraft, a B-25 Mitchell, was lost in a typhoon on October 7, 1945. With fuel running low and the aircraft wing damaged, Johnson gave the bail out command. It was discovered that two passengers had come aboard without parachutes. In a final act of bravery, Johnson and Nolan gave up their parachutes to the two passengers, and disappeared with the aircraft. All four of the remaining crew and passengers, who bailed out, were saved.

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## Specifications

Type:	Fighter Aircraft
First Flight:	XP-38 on January 27, 1939
Wingspan:	52 feet
Length:	37 feet 10 inches
Height:	12 feet 10 inches
Wing Area:	328 square feet
Weight, Empty:	12,800 pounds
Weight, Loaded:	20,700 pounds
Power:	Two Allison V-1710, 1,475 horsepower engines
Normal Crew:	One
Typical Armament:	Four .50 caliber machine guns; one 20 mm cannon; 3,200 pound bomb load

## Performance

Cruise Speed:	290 miles per hour
Top Speed:	414 miles per hour at 25,000 feet
Range:	450 miles
Service Ceiling:	44,000 feet