



LINDBERGH IN THE PACIFIC-1944

Through his devoted efforts, the 'Lone Eagle' helped American airmen achieve the very best performance from their aircraft. He ultimately saved many pilots' lives.

By Walter Schoendorf

All photos from the *WINGS & AIRPOWER* historical archives.

'Business end' of one of the greatest fighter aircraft ever built – Lockheed's twin-engined, twin-tailed demon, the P-38 Lightning. Drop tanks mounted below inboard wing sections effectively extended the aircraft's operating range to an impressive 2,600 miles, but Charles Lindbergh essentially re-wrote the book for economizing fuel consumption on extended overwater operations. His efforts enhanced the aircraft's combat effectiveness and saved many pilots' lives.

Charles Lindbergh, one of the world's greatest aviators, probably spent as much time in the air as on the ground during his 74-year lifetime. Together with other barnstormers of his era, Lindbergh showed the world that skill, knowledge and experience could elevate flying from a daredevil sport to a respected profession. His epic 33-1/2 hour solo flight across the Atlantic in 1927 created a wave of worldwide hysteria and instantly made him a hero. The outflow of adulation and acclaim was unprecedented in world history and his boyish grin and genuine humility endeared him to everyone. Subsequently, his involvement with Pan American World Airways and TWA enabled those companies to pioneer historic transcontinental and transoceanic routes, and his genuine motivation advanced the cause of air transport for both commerce and the traveling public.

In December 1941, Lindbergh's career entered a new era, for he was a man of grace and courage, and he loved his country to a fault. With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Lindbergh desperately wanted to serve his country, and as a Colonel in the Air Corps Reserve, he offered his services to the military but was soundly rejected because of his vocal isolationist politics. President Franklin D. Roosevelt publicly called him disloyal. As a result, Lindbergh resigned his Air Corps Commission, and then offered his expertise to Pan American, Curtiss Wright, and the United Aircraft Corporation, as all were engaged in the war effort, but those offers too were solidly rejected because of political pressure originating within the Roosevelt administration. Even his life-long friend and founder of Pan American, the great Juan Trippe, could not help him.

It was Henry Ford, a stubborn and independent individual who admired Lindbergh and agreed with his politics who finally offered to help. Ford had been awarded a military contract to build B-24 Liberator bombers and asked Lindbergh to join him in monitoring the production of this aircraft and to solve a problem with the physiology of high altitude flight. New military aircraft were capable of reaching very high altitudes which generated many questions concerning the effects on human pilots. While with Ford, Lindbergh visited the Aviation Medicine Unit at the Mayo Clinic, in Rochester, where extensive research into the effects of high altitude flying was being conducted.

Hypoxia - the inadequate oxygenation of the blood at high altitudes, fascinated Lindbergh. For ten days he conducted experiments, allowing himself to experience the effects of hypoxia in an altitude chamber. He concluded that with proper training a pilot could recognize his own symptoms, and react in time to prevent loss of consciousness. This new information soon became part of every pilot's training. Ironically, while at Willow Run conducting engine ignition breakdown tests at 36,000 feet, Lindbergh's oxygen system developed problems and he began to suffer hypoxia. In his book, *Of Flight and Life*, he vividly describes the onset of this insidious condition:

"I grow aware of that vagueness of mind and emptiness of breath which warn a pilot of a serious lack of oxygen." He continues, "I force myself to alertness, I must think or die! The idea lashes brain and body like a whip. Mask leaking? I shove it up with my hand - no, tight around my face. Out of oxygen? No. A glance at the gauge shows fifty pounds. Then something must be wrong with the oxygen system. I know from altitude cham-

ber experience that I have about 15 seconds of consciousness left at this altitude - nether time or clearness of mind to check hoses and connections. Life demands oxygen and the only sure supply lies six miles beneath me". Shoving the stick forward he quickly dove to a safe altitude and was able to save his life. Upon investigation, an oxygen pressure gauge was found to be defective.

Negative perceptions of Lindbergh and his politics were gradually reduced by the passage of time and the country's pre-occupation with the war. Invited to visit the United Aircraft Corporation, Lindbergh went to East Hartford, Connecticut, where United was developing a new aircraft for the Navy and Marine Corps. This new fighter-bomber, designated the F4U, would become known as the Corsair. Its powerful engine intrigued Lindbergh, and he spent hours examining the 2,000-hp Pratt-Whitney R-2800-8 engine.

Eugene Wilson, President of United, asked Lindbergh to join his company and assist in the development of the Corsair. Lindbergh accepted, and in January 1944 he started work at the Vought-Sikorsky Division of United at Stratford, Connecticut, quickly becoming familiar with the F4U and training other test pilots. The Corsair was both a land and carrier-based aircraft, and its unique gull wing allowed the large propeller to clear the ground on takeoff. For shipboard operations, the outer wings folded over the cockpit to accommodate the

limited space on an aircraft carrier. Its primary armament consisted of six .50-inch Browning MG 53-2 machine guns mounted in the wings, and by the end of the war the Corsair would be credited with downing more than 2,000 enemy planes.

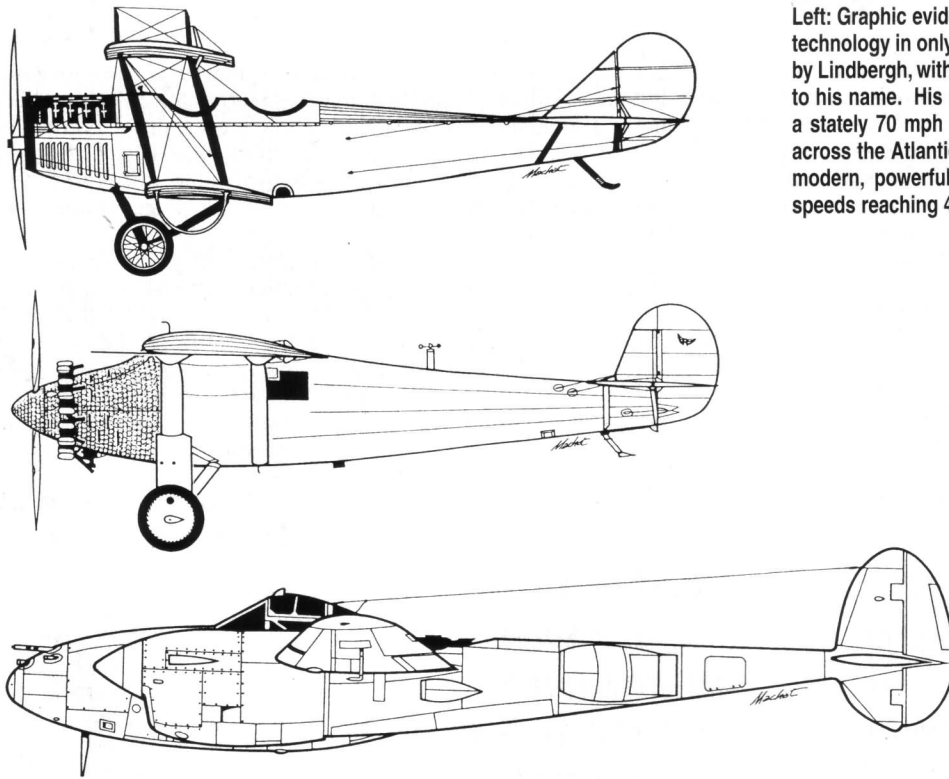
Eager to get to the war zone, he met with Brigadier General Louis E. Wood of the Marine Corps in January 1944 seeking permission to travel to the South Pacific. He explained that his mission as a consultant would be to investigate reports about various problems experienced by the military concerning airplanes produced by United Aircraft. After conferring with his superiors, the General informed Lindbergh that he could go. Lindbergh's wife, Anne, said that her husband's work at United had made a new man out of him.

Several months would elapse before his travel plans were finalized, however, and he continued with his test flights. At Eglin Field in Florida, in the span of four days he test flew eight different aircraft ranging in complexity from high performance single-seat fighters to the massive Boeing B-29 four-engined bomber. Many of these aircraft were experimental with dangerous or unknown flight characteristics and Lindbergh risked his life every time he flew one of them, but his vast experience and natural abilities made him a true 'pilot's pilot', and there was nothing he couldn't fly.

By April 1944, Lindbergh prepared to leave for his long journey to the South Pacific. He said farewell to his wife and five children and traveled to New York where he was inoculated for six tropical diseases commonly found in the South Pacific. While in New York he strolled through the Museum of Natural History and stood in front an aircraft hung on display, a float-equipped red-and-black Lockheed Sirius 8 named *Tingmissartooq*. His thoughts must have drifted to the many exotic and foreign locales where he and Anne had flown in this airplane in 1931 and 1933. (This aircraft is now on exhibit at the Smithsonian National Air & Space Museum.)

While in New York, Lindbergh acquired his personal gear.

If the unthinkable had ever happened and he was shot down and captured, it would have been a terrible loss for America. If he had died in combat, it would have become a national scandal.



Left: Graphic evidence of the spectacular advancement of aviation technology in only two decades. These three aircraft were all flown by Lindbergh, with the *Spirit of St. Louis* (center) being forever linked to his name. His barnstorming 1923 Curtiss JN-4 Jenny (top) had a stately 70 mph top speed, while the sleeker Ryan NYP cruised across the Atlantic at 105 mph in 1927. Only sixteen years later, a modern, powerful machine like the P-38 was in operation with speeds reaching 400 mph. (Aircraft are shown in scale.)

Right: "Whistling Death" to the enemy, but a trusted mount for Navy and Marine pilots on both land and sea, the Vought Corsair was the best naval fighter of its day. The F4U-1A shown here is carrying a single 160-gal. 'Duramold' auxiliary fuel tank beneath the fuselage. It was the Vought division of United Aircraft Corporation requesting Lindbergh's assistance in examining the ultimate performance capabilities of this powerful fighter that led to his Pacific sojourn from April to September, 1944. He flew the aircraft from Vought's New Haven, Connecticut plant to San Diego, stopping at many Naval and Marine Air Stations along the way to familiarize himself with the high-performance fighter. The Corsair was powered by a single 2,000-hp Pratt & Whitney R-2800 radial engine.

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First to Brooks Brothers for uniforms. With no display of insignia or rank, his South Pacific uniforms were those of a naval officer. Next to Abercrombie & Fitch for a waterproof flashlight. At Brentano's bookstore there was one final item. Charles Lindbergh bought a copy of the New Testament.

Storage space on the Navy Corsair he was to fly was so limited that he stored personal items behind the radio, between the rudder pedals by his feet and in the wing. The day before his departure he chose to test fly his Corsair, and shot six landings to evaluate a newly redesigned oleo strut on the landing gear. Initially, the Corsair had a problem upon landing. The aircraft would frequently bounce, resulting in damage to the aircraft or injury to the pilot. On a carrier, the tailhook would frequently bounce over the arresting wires without engaging, and in the days before angled decks, if a pilot was lucky enough, he could abort the landing and go around. For many pilots, however, there was no second chance if they crashed through the safety barrier and cartwheeled into other aircraft parked on the forward deck, or slid off the flight deck and plunged into the ocean. The landing gear were redesigned as single stroke units which would compress on landing and not rebound, and Lindbergh pronounced it as a great improvement.

On Friday, April 7th, he departed Sikorsky Airport in New Haven, Connecticut for the trip to the California. His flight plan was to first fly south to the Marine base at Cherry Point, North Carolina, then on to Jacksonville, Florida where he discussed the Corsair's performance with operational pilots, and asked for suggestions or improvements. This became his routine at each base, and frequently, he would invite other pilots to fly his Corsair and test the new landing gear system.

Three days later he headed for Eglin Field in northern Florida, then west to Galveston and El Paso, Texas, and on to

Palm Springs. Landing at the Mojave California Marine Air Station, the plane's engine developed a serious oil leak that required repair. On Saturday, April 15, he flew to the Marine Air Base at Santa Barbara where he again had several pilots fly his plane to test the new landing gear as he watched from an observation tower.

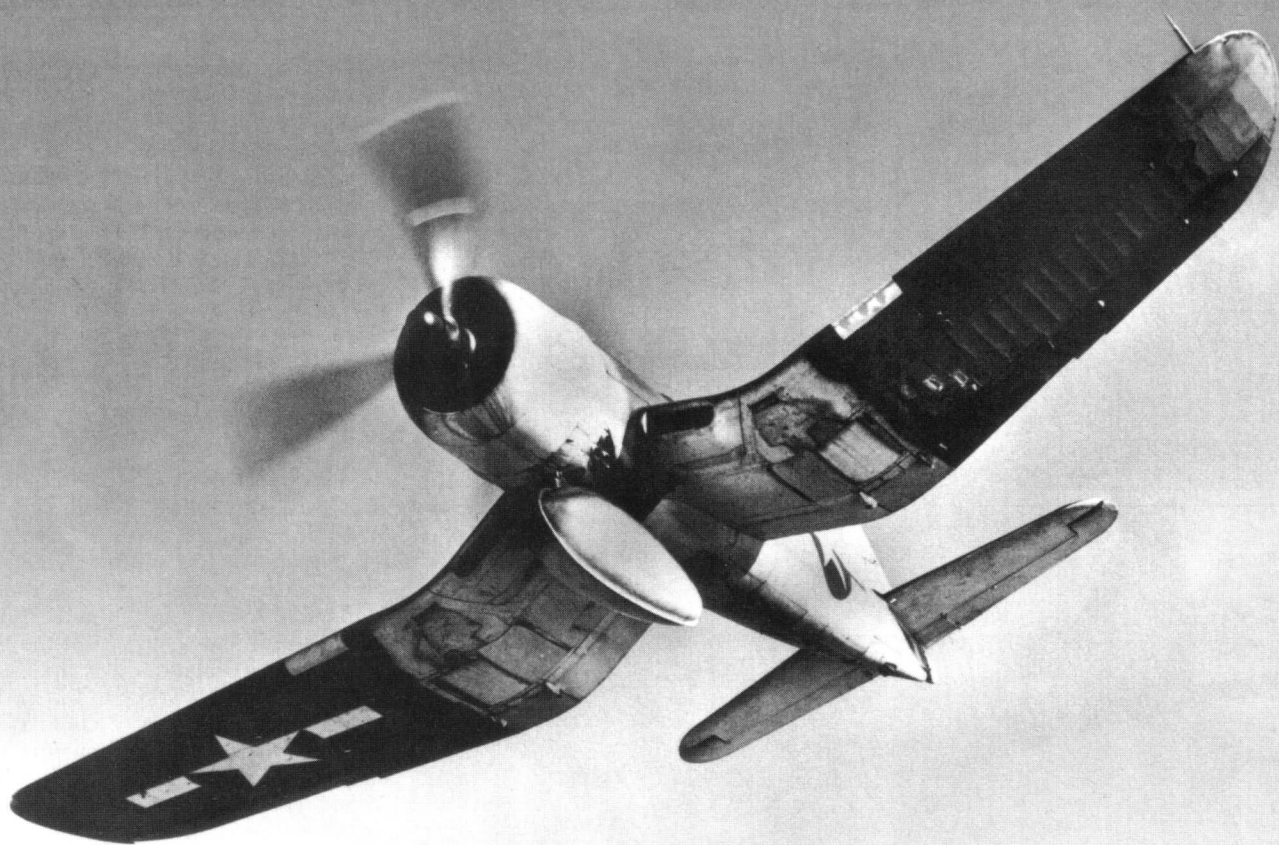
On April 17, he flew south to the Marine Base at El Toro and then took off for North Island at San Diego - the last base on his continental U. S. journey before venturing out to the South Pacific. While waiting for travel arrangements, he returned to the El Toro Marine Base to engage in gunnery practice with a flight of six Corsairs, achieving the highest percentage of hits in the entire flight.

The next day he returned to North Island and on Monday, April 24, at 21:38 Pacific Time he departed for Oahu, Hawaii in a Douglas R4D (Navy DC-3) on the first leg of his long Pacific journey. The only personnel on board were the pilot, co-pilot, radio operator and navigator, and Lindbergh took turns with the pilot flying the ship. After a flight of more than fifteen hours they landed at the naval field at Kaneohe, Hawaii.

Two days later he was on a flight to Midway Island aboard a Marine Curtiss C-46, and as was his practice, he piloted the Commando for part of that flight as well. At Midway, he conferred with squadron officers about their experiences with the Corsair as the official representative of United aircraft. After two days at Midway, he returned to Oahu on a PBM flying boat, again piloting the aircraft for two one-hour shifts during the long 7-1/2 hour flight.

The next day he left for New Guinea. First stop was Palmyra, a small atoll with a single runway. Then to Funafuti, Espiritu Santo, and Guadalcanal refueling at every stop along the way and finally landing at Bougainville. There he was shown the battlefield and devastation where more than 1,700 Japanese soldiers died. He then proceeded to Green Island, located northwest of the Solomon Islands and west of New Ireland. This was a Marine base and Lindbergh once remarked, "The more I see of the Marines, the more I like them".

He asked whether or not he could accompany them on a combat mission, and in his own words, "I heard an immediate



invitation". Their mission would take them over New Ireland and then on to the heavily-fortified Japanese-held city of Rabaul, located on the island of New Britain. It was strictly illegal for a U.S. civilian to participate on a military combat mission, but for Charles Lindbergh, the military chose to look the other way. In retrospect, even allowing for a natural attitude of hero-worship, this was a serious error of misguided enthusiasm. If the unthinkable had ever happened and he was shot down and captured by the Japanese it would have been a terrible loss for America. (Stories were already circulating that the Japanese had beheaded some captured flyers.) If he'd died on a combat mission, it would have become a national scandal.

For the Rabaul mission, he was issued a .45-caliber automatic pistol, parachute, leg knife, life raft and jungle survival kit. Four Corsairs took off, with Lindbergh flying as wingman for Marine Major Alan Armstrong. On this mission, during a strafing run on a ground target, Lindbergh came within twenty feet of the treetops before pulling out of a dive at nearly 400 mph.

On May 24, he went on a reconnaissance and strafing mission to the northeast coast of New Ireland looking for signs of Japanese activity. After strafing numerous buildings they returned to their base on Green Island. As they approached, Lindbergh described the landing procedure. "We are in the landing circle. Throttle down to fifteen inches. Airspeed 170 miles per hour. The leading plane drops its gear. I push my lever forward. Roll back the tabs as the nose drops. Propeller to 2,300 rpm. Air speed 140 miles per hour. The plane ahead of me is on its final. I bank over and open the hatch; 130 miles per hour - slow enough to drop the flaps. I put them down all the way. The plane ahead of me is rather close. I overturn the strip to gain distance. Propeller to 2,300 rpm in case I get a wave off. Manifold pressure up to twenty. (Take no chance of the engine loading up; the runway drops off abruptly at its end, and under-shooting would probably be fatal). The plane ahead has landed, and is rolling rapidly ahead. I bank right for final line-up. Over the end now. Throttle closed. Stick back. I am on the ground".

On May 25th, he and his Marine flyers were assigned to

escort and protect a flight of seven R4D twin-engined transports bound for Emirau. This island was located in the St. Matthias Group off the northwest tip of New Ireland. The day was clear with visibility unlimited. Flying above the slower transports, they had to weave back and forth to stay with them. With no signs of enemy transport they landed on Emirau and remained there until June 6th. While on Emirau, Lindbergh participated on a mission over the Japanese held city of Kavieng. The patrol was uneventful except for the sighting of a Japanese barge that had been sunk but was still repairable, and they dove on the barge and shot several hundred rounds, completely destroying the vessel.

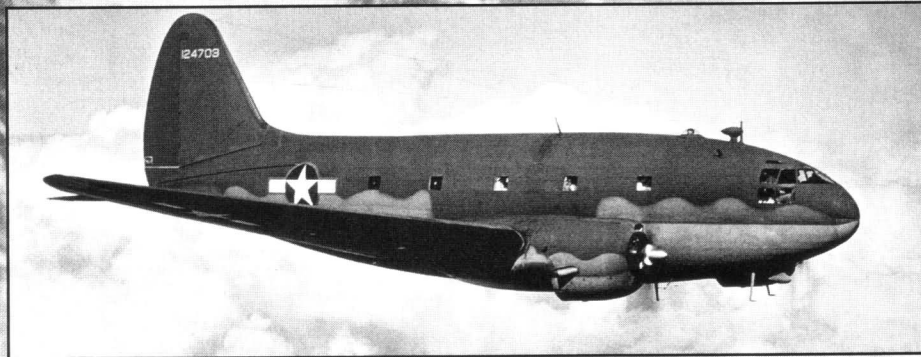
That evening, seeing the opportunity for a new experience, Lindbergh chose to be on board a PT-boat during its patrol. The boat was assigned to patrol along the southwest coast of New Ireland to prevent Japanese supply barges from moving along the coast after dark. While travelling to their area, they engaged in small-arms target practice while moving at a high rate of speed through the water. Their targets were flying fish which leapt out of the water, and Lindbergh drew his .45-caliber automatic and shot the fish in midair, as he was a superb marksman both on the ground and in the air.

On May 29th and 30th they dropped 500-lb. bombs on the city of Kavieng, although he had strong moral objections to that type of warfare. "I don't like this bombing and machine-gunning of unknown targets", he once remarked. Although Lindbergh enjoyed military life, like many others, he abhorred the horrors of war. He proved his bombing accuracy, however, when on June 5th he scored a direct hit on the centerline of a runway at a Japanese airfield in Kavieng. On June 9th, he completed his 14th and final mission with the Marines over Rabaul. As fellow airmen, they accepted him as one of their own and were quite impressed with his flying skills.

He traveled to Bougainville in the Solomon Islands and then in a TBF to Henderson Field at Guadalcanal. On June 15, Lindbergh flew as a passenger on a Australian airliner and landed at Finschhafen, New Guinea. A young Army pilot invited Lindbergh to accompany him in his Stinson L-5 to Nadzab - a massive air base with four airstrips, and a forward base of oper-



Left: The venerable Douglas DC-3 passenger airliner met the wartime needs for an effective military transport, and the C-47 (Army) and R4D (Navy/Marine) series of aircraft was born. 860-hp Wright Cyclones gave way to 1,200-hp P&W Twin Wasps, and a cargo door and heavier floor were added as well. Lindbergh flew from North Island NAS, San Diego to Oahu, Hawaii in an R4D, gladly sharing the piloting chores along the way.



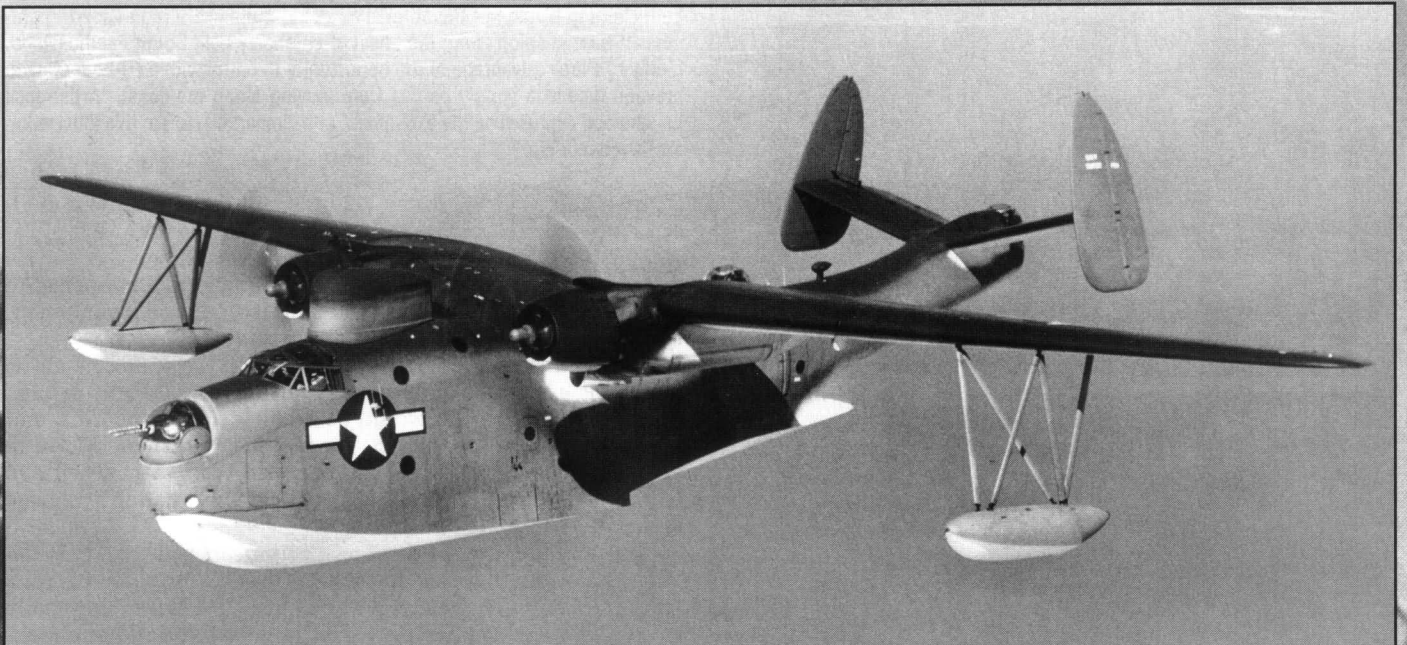
Bigger, and sometimes better for outside cargo loads of its day, the Curtiss C-46 Commando carried more payload than the C-47 with nearly twice the range. It had a 48,000-lb. max gross takeoff weight compared to the 31,000-lb. C-47, and each of the Commando's P&W R-2800 engines produced 800 more horsepower than one of the C-47's Twin Wasps. However, the C-46 always seemed to take a bad rap for its handling when compared to the C-47.

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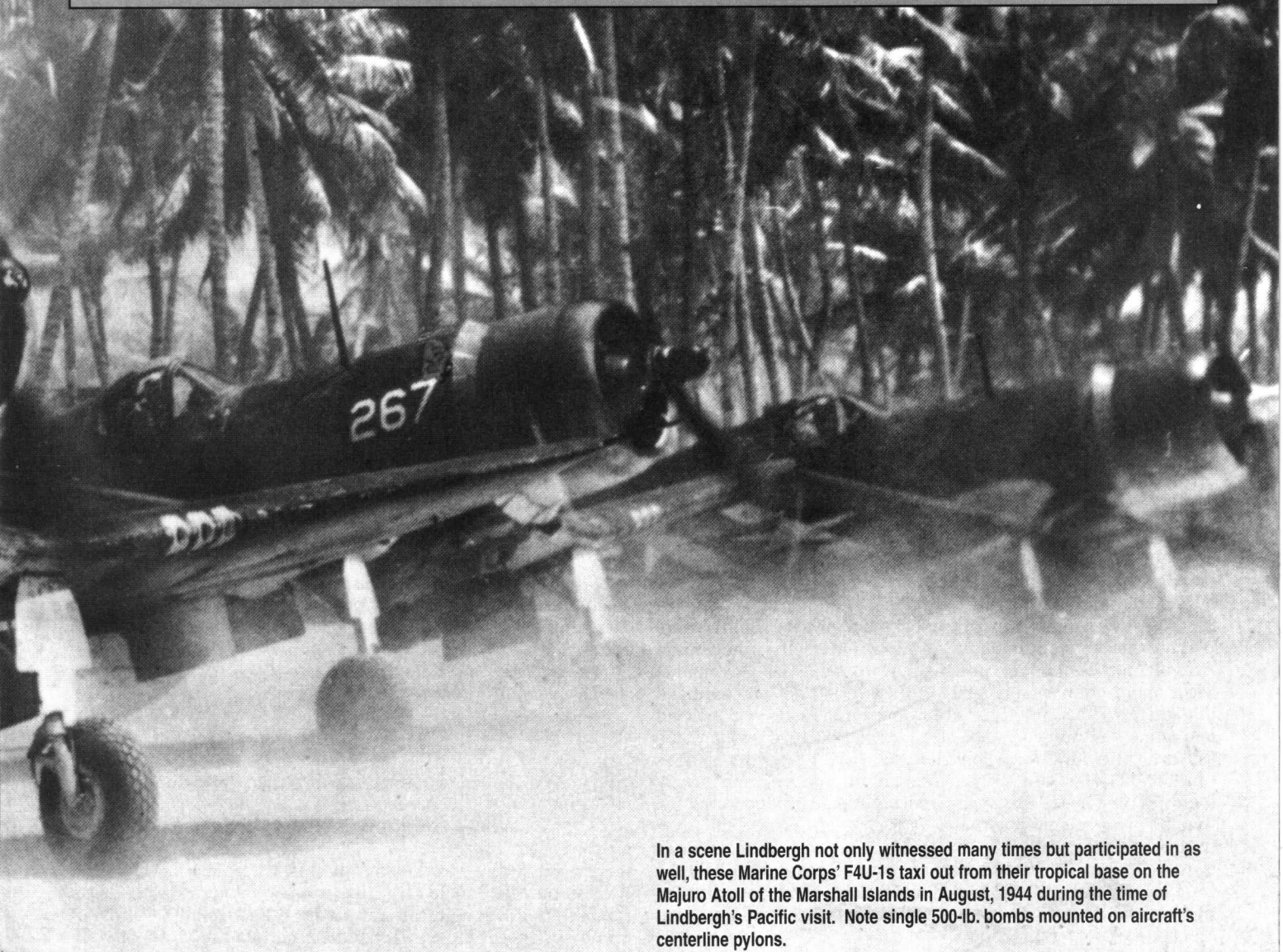
ations against the Japanese. Located in the Markham Valley, it had been captured from the Japanese in September 1943 by the 503rd Paratroop Regiment.

On June 26th, Lindbergh flew to Hollandia, located on the north coast of New Guinea and then part of the Dutch East Indies. Hollandia was the base for the 475th Fighter Group of the Fifth Air Force, commanded by Colonel Charles H. MacDonald, who became the third-ranking ace in the South Pacific with 27 kills. The Group would eventually be credited with shooting down 545 Japanese aircraft, and was equipped with Lockheed P-38 Lightnings. Lindbergh was most anxious to fly the twin-engined fighter. Upon his arrival at Hollandia, he was lent an aircraft for the trip - a P-38

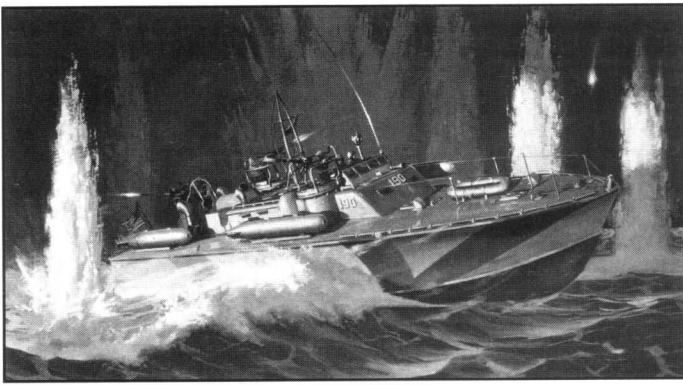




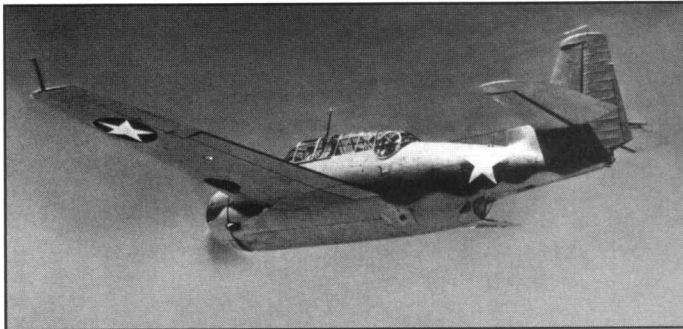
By the time of Lindbergh's Pacific journeys in 1944, the much-improved Martin PBM-5 Mariner was in full production. Developed primarily for anti-submarine patrol, the large twin-engine flying boat was also used for night bombing and transport missions. With its 118-ft. wingspan and 80-ft. length, the Mariner dwarfed Consolidated's PBY Catalina, which was used more for rescue duty, and boasted an impressive range of more than 3,000 miles. Top speed was 230 mph, and Lindbergh flew from Midway back to Oahu in the PBM on his way across the Pacific.



In a scene Lindbergh not only witnessed many times but participated in as well, these Marine Corps' F4U-1s taxi out from their tropical base on the Majuro Atoll of the Marshall Islands in August, 1944 during the time of Lindbergh's Pacific visit. Note single 500-lb. bombs mounted on aircraft's centerline pylons.



Left: Nothing would get the adrenaline going quite like a high-speed night-time PT-boat mission along the coast of an enemy-held South Pacific island. Lindbergh took advantage of the opportunity to patrol with a PT-boat crew to prevent Japanese supply barges from moving along the coast. Artist Jack Leynwood captures all the excitement of a similar mission in this illustration for Revell models.



Above: Grumman's stalwart TBF Avenger torpedo bomber was the largest carrier-based aircraft of its time, and one of the largest single-engined airplanes of WWII. Lindbergh flew in a TBF from the Solomon Islands to Henderson Field at Guadalcanal in June 1944.

Below: Small, yet effective, the Stinson L-5 served in all major theaters of World War II as a liaison and utility transport for high-ranking field and staff officers. Lindbergh accompanied a young Army L-5 pilot from Finschhafen, New Guinea to Nadzeb Field in the Markham Valley, a captured Japanese airstrip complex being used as a forward operations base.



that had been assigned to legendary ace Richard Bong. Its fuselage was decorated with many 'rising sun' kill emblems, and as the big aircraft rolled to a stop, base personnel rushed out to greet the ace. To their dismay, a tall 42-year-old civilian with a receding hairline climbed out of the cockpit instead.

When Lindbergh arrived at 475th headquarters to report in, Col. MacDonald and his deputy Col. Meryl Smith were playing checkers. Lindbergh introduced himself as the United Aircraft representative, but failing to recognize his name, MacDonald continued playing. Most likely he was annoyed that this was just another interfering civilian he had to feed and house. "Are you a pilot and what is your name?" he asked curtly. Lindbergh repeated his name. "Not the Charles Lindbergh!", he said as he jumped to his feet and shook hands with the tall distinguished civilian. Lindbergh stated that he was interested in the P-38's performance, and they immediately began to discuss the merits of the various aircraft they had flown and soon became good friends. Lindbergh's eyes must have lit up when MacDonald invited him on the next day's mission to the Japanese-held bases on Samate and the Jefman Islands.

MacDonald didn't know if Lindbergh could handle a modern, twin-engined high-performance fighter, as all of his pilots were in their 20's while Lindbergh was twice their age at 42. He wasn't about to take any chances, for if something happened to Lindbergh while under his command, it would be a monumental disaster and most likely the end of his military career.

For Lindbergh's first combat flight with the 475th, he chose two of his best pilots and himself to fly the mission: his deputy, Col. Meryl Smith, who would be credited with nine kills, and Major Thomas B. McGuire, as Lindbergh's wingmen. McGuire would become the second leading ace in World War II with 38 victories and was posthumously given the nation's highest award the - Medal of Honor. Lindbergh and McGuire also became friends, for a time sharing the same tent. They frequently flew on missions together. While flying a combat mission on January 7, 1945, McGuire risked flying an extremely hazardous maneuver at low altitude to save the life of a comrade, and crashed into the jungle with fatal results. Lindbergh was shocked and saddened by the death of his friend, and the following letter he wrote to McGuire's widow reveals the affection he had for the lost flyer.

April 28, 1945

Dear Mrs. McGuire:

Twice before I have written to you since your husband's death, and each time I have torn the letter up for it did not say what I wished to convey to you.

Now, within a few days, I must leave on a unexpected mission into the European area and I do not want to leave without writing to you however inadequate the letter may be.

It is not that I have known Major McGuire for a long time or that I could number myself among his closest friends; but friendships made in such places as the army camps of New Guinea and under combat conditions, take on a quality of their own which cannot be measured in the ordinary terms of time.

I flew with your husband on a number of missions when his squadron was based at Hollandia, and again after he had moved his group to the island of Biak. At his invitation, I stayed with him in his tent near Mokmer drome. We went through the Biak caves and dynamited fish together to get fresh food. He was one of the ablest officers I have known and one of the finest pilots I have ever flown with. He often spoke of you during the evenings in his tent, and I know that he expected to return home within a few weeks of the time I left, that was late August. I think the Phillipine campaign, and the opportunity of taking part, as he did so brilliantly, probably caused him to postpone his plans for returning to the United States.

I had hoped to see your husband again in this country, and to continue the friendship which began in that Hollandia jungle camp. The announcement of his death came to me as a great shock, and with it, I felt a keen personal loss.

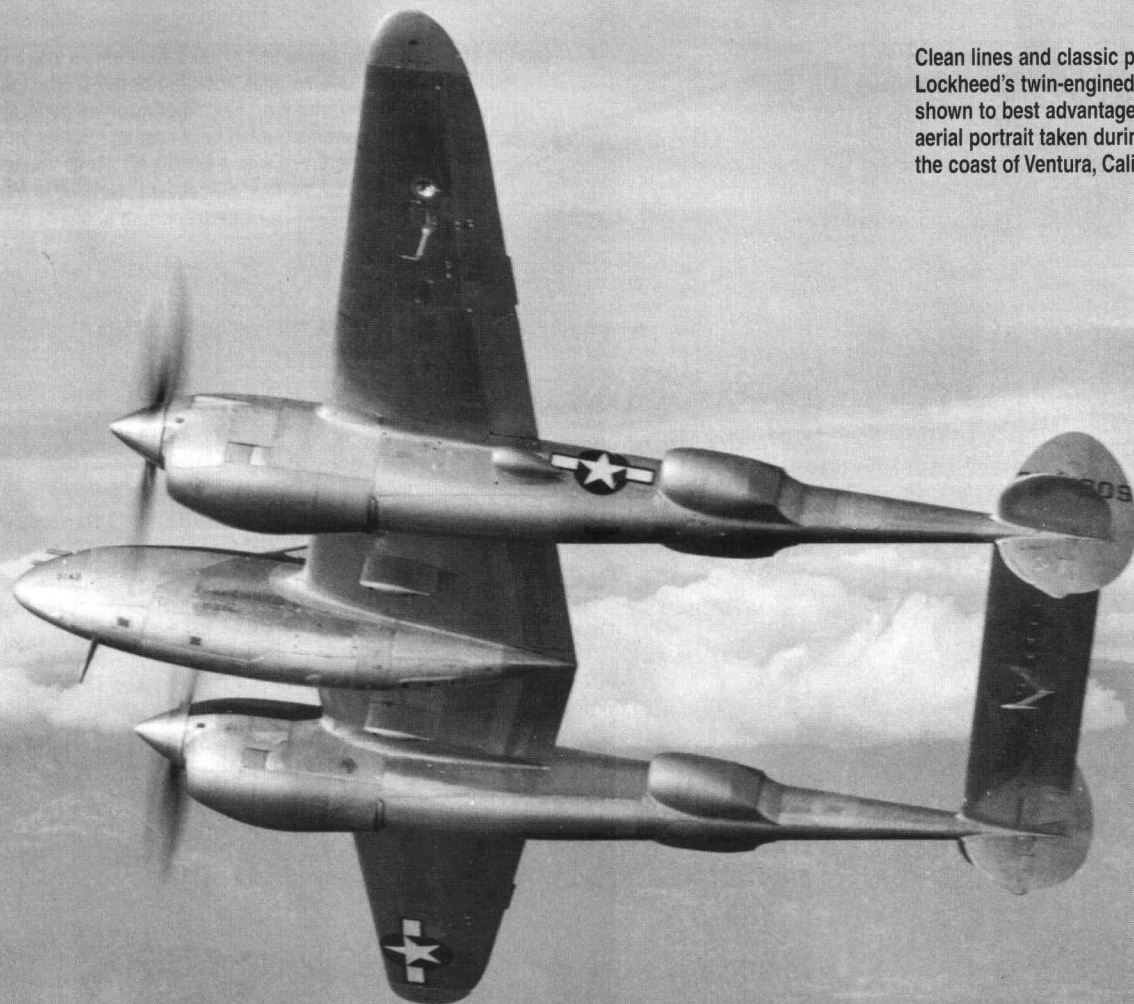
I think there is no need for me to tell you that you have my deepest sympathy.

Sincerely,
Charles A. Lindbergh

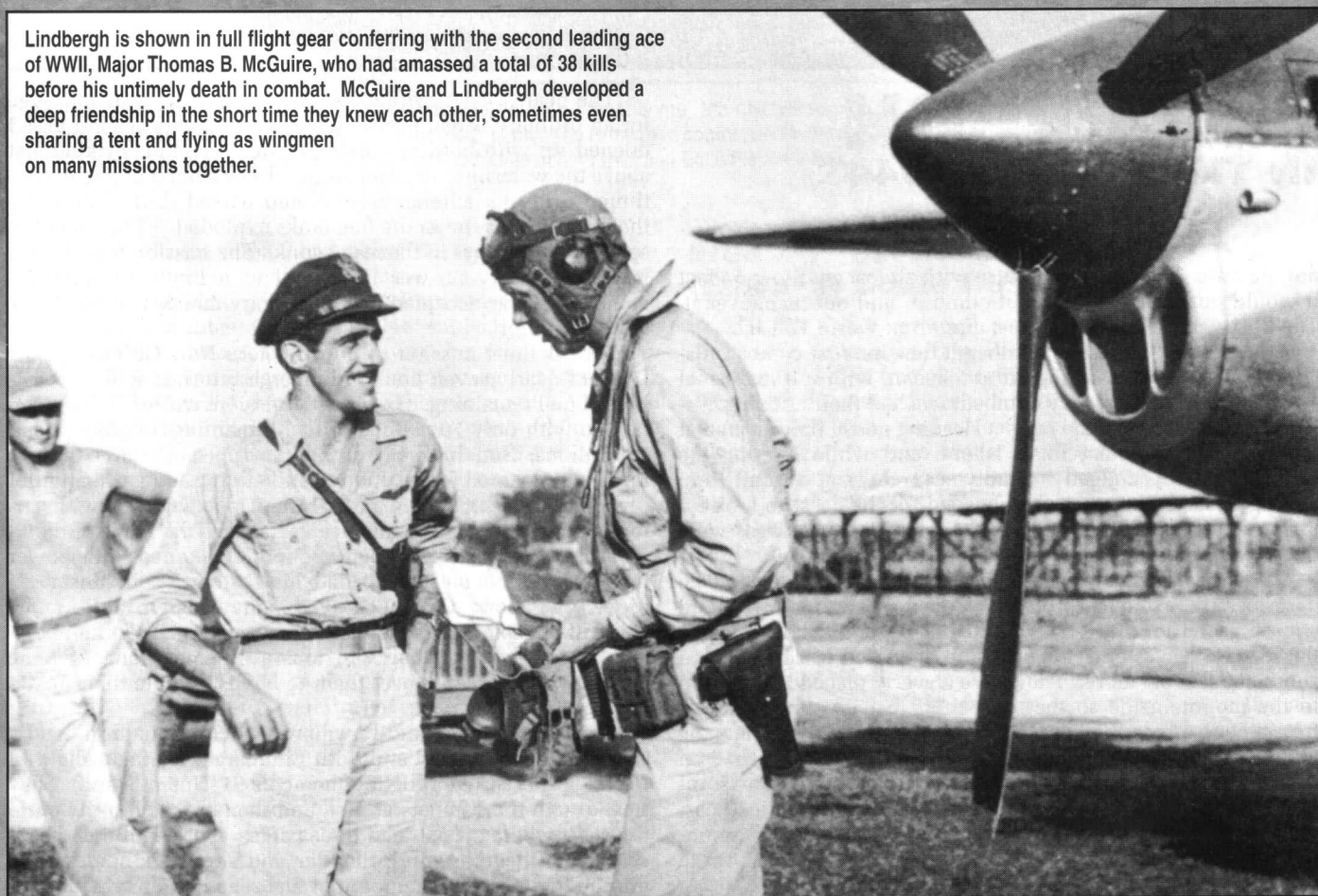
This unpublished letter was found in a wonderful book about the life of Thomas McGuire entitled *The Last Great Ace*, written by Charles Martin and used here with his kind permission.

The Lightning was the ideal aircraft for combat in the South Pacific. As MacDonald said, "It was a marvelous aircraft. It was the best craft I flew in the war by far. I liked the P-38's rate of climb, it's speed, the way it handled, and its firepower directly

Clean lines and classic proportions of Lockheed's twin-engine masterpiece are shown to best advantage in this stunning aerial portrait taken during a test flight off the coast of Ventura, California.



Lindbergh is shown in full flight gear conferring with the second leading ace of WWII, Major Thomas B. McGuire, who had amassed a total of 38 kills before his untimely death in combat. McGuire and Lindbergh developed a deep friendship in the short time they knew each other, sometimes even sharing a tent and flying as wingmen on many missions together.



Ground crewman loads ammo belt of .50-caliber shells into a Lightning's gun bay. P-38Ls, like the ones operated by the 475th Fighter Group, were armed with four .50-caliber machine guns, and a single 37-mm cannon mounted below center. Earlier models of the Lightning were armed with a Bendix M1 20mm cannon installed below the four .50-calibers. Note nose-mounted gun camera aperture at center of nose cone.



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out the nose. The P-38 would turn with almost anything, in fact it would out-turn the P-47, out-climb it, and out-maneuver it. The P-38 was one of the greatest aircraft of World War II”.

On Tuesday June 27th, Lindbergh flew his first combat mission with the 475th. Taking off at 5:30a.m. with full main fuel tanks and belly tanks, they climbed, reached their cruising altitude and crossed over the jungle. Heading north, they arrived at the Japanese base at Jefman Island, and while circling the enemy airfield, dodged deadly-accurate anti-aircraft fire. Failing to see any targets, they headed for the coast to look for Japanese barges, as the occasional submarine and barges were the only method the Japanese had to obtain supplies.

In *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh*, he describes the excitement of this combat mission. “We found two barges around the next point on the point, both camouflaged with leaves and branches and anchored or run aground about 200 feet off shore. They were cleverly placed in a scallop in the mountainside so that you either had to shoot at them from a bank or chandelle up a steep mountainside after making your pass. Any error in judgement would leave you crashed on the mountain. I curved in over the top of one ridge at an indicated speed of 250 mph, missing trees by not over ten feet, partially straightened out while shooting, and pulled up the mountainside beyond in a steep left turn which left me headed out to sea and in a position in the strafing circle.

The nearest boat, which we concentrated on, was too large for an ordinary barge, probably a lugger. On my second pass I opened up with both machine guns and cannon, striking just above the waterline, aft of midships. I saw a burst of flame, continued firing for another second, and passed thirty feet above the masts just as the fuel tanks exploded.” The flight left several more barges in flames or sunk. The mission lasted 6-1/2 hours and everyone was impressed with Lindbergh’s performance. He was accepted as an honorary member of the 475th Fighter Group.

On his third mission to northwestern New Guinea, after a flight of nearly seven hours, Lindbergh returned with 210 gallons of fuel remaining. On his fifth mission, while his wingman landed with only 70 gallons of fuel remaining, Lindbergh had 260 gallons. Both had started with the same amount on takeoff. Lindbergh learned fuel economy while flying as an airmail pilot early in his career, and he’d experimented extensively with various power settings to dramatically increase the range of the P-38. The younger pilots seemed more concerned with power than fuel economy, and needed his instruction in this technique. His efforts ultimately saved many lives. In addition, by using his fuel saving techniques, they could strike at more distant targets beyond their previously assumed range, as the enemy would never expect them to almost double their operational radius.

This was proven handily when the 433rd Squadron, led by Captain John Paransky and with Lindbergh leading a flight of four P-38s, escorted a flight of bombers to Jefman Island. They stayed with the bombers at first, and then broke off to fly on to the coast where they strafed three barges. The flight then headed back to their base on Hollandia, and after a six hour and 40 minute flight, the least amount of fuel remaining in any of their

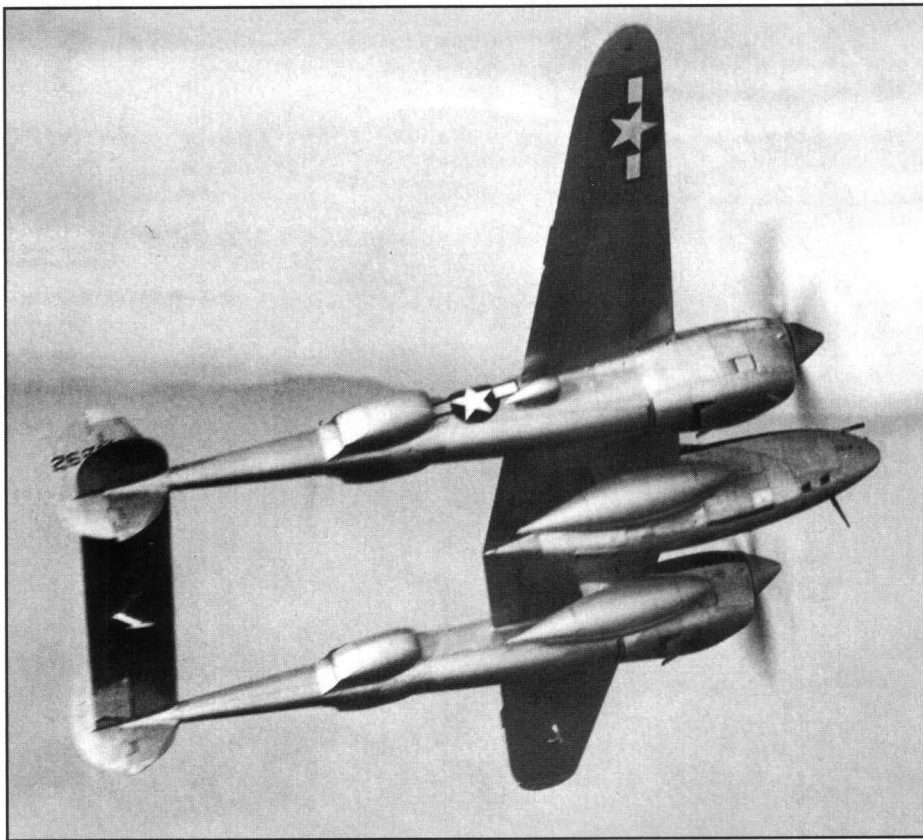
Right: Clean and beautifully organized cockpit was home to P-38 pilots on missions sometimes lasting as long as eight hours. A control wheel was chosen over a normal fighter's joystick to give the pilots more leverage in handling the large aircraft at high speeds and G-loads, but control yoke was mounted on an off-center stalk for more legroom. Note engine control pedestal mounted on left side of cockpit with throttles (larger knobs) and propeller controls.

Below: Another view of P-38 cockpit showing a Lockheed test pilot possibly posing as a study for an instruction manual, as he is reaching for the guard switch that feathers the number two propeller. Careful examination of the photo, however, shows the engine missing from the right wing.

tanks was 160 gallons. Lindbergh felt he'd accomplished his task, and later, his engine settings would be incorporated into The Pilots Manual for the P-38 Lightning.

On October 14, 1944, several months after Charles had left the area to return home, a flight of P-38s were sent on a mission to escort a squadron of B-24 bombers to Balikpapan, the oil producing area in Borneo – a grueling roundtrip of 1,600 miles. As they neared their target, Japanese fighters rose to engage them. Lieutenant Joseph M. Forster





Left: Inflight shot of this P-38J nicely shows the two teardrop-shaped 165-gal. auxiliary fuel tanks which gave the 20,000-lb. Lightning an extended ferry range (non-combat configuration) of nearly 2,600 statute miles. P-38's internal fuel capacity was 410 US gals., and fuel from the external tanks were usually burned off first to allow them to be jettisoned if necessary for potential air-to-air combat.

Below: Slightly more bulbous 300-gal. drop tanks are shown on this head-on view of an experimental P-38F on the north ramp at Lockheed's famed Burbank facility. Although this configuration with the larger fuel tanks and four 4.5-in. bazooka launchers was never used operationally, the larger auxiliary tanks were used to augment the Lightning's combat radius in the Pacific.

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quickly entered the melee and dove on a Japanese Oscar and opened fire as the enemy aircraft came into range. He watched the Oscar plunge to the earth. Suddenly, his Lightning started to shake and his left engine started to stream oil and smoke, for he'd failed to notice the Japanese interceptor on his tail. Diving toward the ocean, he fortunately lost his pursuer, but as he feathered his left engine, he realized he indeed had a serious problem. He'd have to travel more than 800 miles over a vast expanse of ocean on only one engine. After Lindbergh's talk, each pilot was given a card with fuel economy settings for various altitudes, and Forster studied his card which he'd taped to the control yoke. After flying for four long hours and 835 miles, he miraculously returned to

his base on Morotai, nicely proving the new theories. Lindbergh had quite literally saved his life.

Early in the New Guinea campaign, before Lindbergh's arrival, there were also serious problems with long-range missions. On one of these to Wewak, flying out of Port Moresby, a squadron had to climb over the Owen Stanley Range, a group of extremely high mountains which resulted in a high rate of fuel consumption. Of sixteen aircraft, five were forced to return and refuel - almost one third of the flight. This problem would plague the Fifth Air Corps until Lindbergh's arrival. However, near the end of the war, with J and L model Lightnings, equipped with larger drop tanks and improved fuel techniques, 2,300-mile missions were possible.

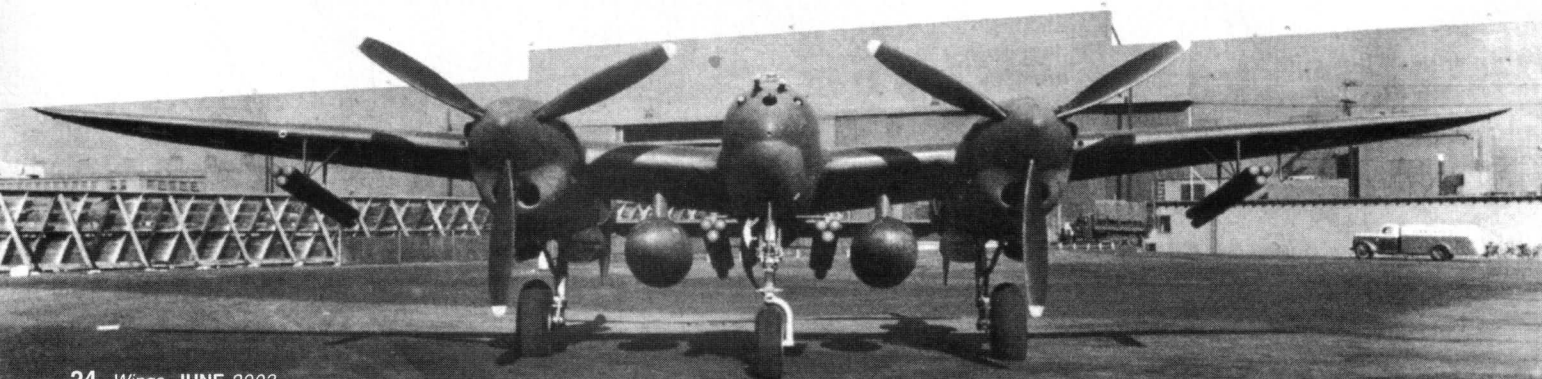
On July 5th, 1944, Lindbergh was asked to report to headquarters of the Fifth Fighter Command in Brisbane, Australia. Apparently, the Fifth had no record of his orders to be in New Guinea until stories

circulated that he was present and flying combat missions. Although he was eventually able to straighten out the problem, discussions were held about his continued flying status, as there were great concerns for his safety. Lindbergh was able to convince General George C. Kenney, commander of Allied Air Forces and Fifth Air Force in the South Pacific, to allow him to continue flying with the 475th, for it was hard to refuse Charles Augustus Lindbergh - the living legend.

Speaking with General Richard K. Sutherland, chief of staff to General Douglas MacArthur, Charles explained why he'd traveled to the South Pacific and what he had learned. It was decided that he would be awarded 'observer' status, thus allowing him to fly on missions and "return fire if he was fired upon". He and General Sutherland then discussed the success Lindbergh had in increasing the range of their aircraft.

Sutherland suggested they talk to General MacArthur, who'd also heard about Lindbergh's effective work. MacArthur questioned him about his achievement of extending the P-38's range without any engine modifications and remarked, "This was a gift from heaven". He also added that Lindbergh could have any aircraft and do any kind of flying he wished, as increased range was of great importance to his campaign in the South Pacific.

Lindbergh returned to his squadron and resumed his combat activities, but



flying with his young comrades was not without humor, and even a pilot of Lindbergh's stature was not spared. On one mission, Charles had difficulty catching up with his flight after takeoff. Suddenly, a lone voice came over the radio and said, "Get your wheels up, you're not flying the *Spirit of St. Louis!*" The world's greatest aviator had forgotten to retract his landing gear!

On Friday, July 28th, Lindbergh went on a mission to the south coast of the Dutch island of Ceram. The targets were Japanese airstrips and aircraft and take-off was at 0740. Climbing to 15,000 feet, he put on his oxygen mask. They circled the target area but did not see any sign of the enemy when suddenly, over the radio on an air-to-air combat frequency, they heard that the 8th Fighter Group had just engaged the enemy, and they rushed to join the fight.

A Japanese fighter piloted by Captain Saburo Shimada, Commanding Officer of the 73rd Independent Chutai, had circled to avoid Capt. Danforth 'Danny' Miller, Group Operations Officer. Suddenly, Lindbergh found himself on a head-on collision course with the Japanese aircraft. Shimada and he flew at each other at a closing speed of more than 500 mph, and as Lindbergh pulled the trigger and held it down, gunpowder fumes filled his cockpit. He saw his tracers and 20mm. cannon shells hitting his target, but Shimada just kept on coming. At the last moment Lindbergh pulled back on his control yoke with all his strength, but Shimada also pulled up. They passed within ten feet of each other, and he felt the bump of the Japanese aircraft's wingtip vortices. He was so close that he claimed he could see the cylinder cooling fins of the radial-engined Japanese aircraft. He continued climbing and as he banked to the left, he watched his quarry's fatal dive into the ocean below.

On August 1, Charles MacDonald, Meryl 'Smitty' Smith, Danforth 'Danny' Miller and Charles Lindbergh went on a mission to the Palaus, a group of islands owned by the Japanese. It was a 1,200-mile roundtrip and all overwater. They lifted off at 0927, climbed to 8,000 feet and set their engine controls for maximum efficiency. MacDonald possessed superior navigational skills, and with only his aircraft compass and wristwatch, he led his flight of four P-38s to that tiny dot in the ocean. Intelligence had reported the existence of 150 enemy aircraft and earlier, before the arrival of Lindbergh, it was accepted that this target was beyond the range of American air forces. They climbed to 15,000 feet and passed over the airstrip at Babelthup but did not sight any enemy aircraft at first. Then they sighted two Japanese seaplanes. They dove and MacDonald downed one while Smith shot down the other.

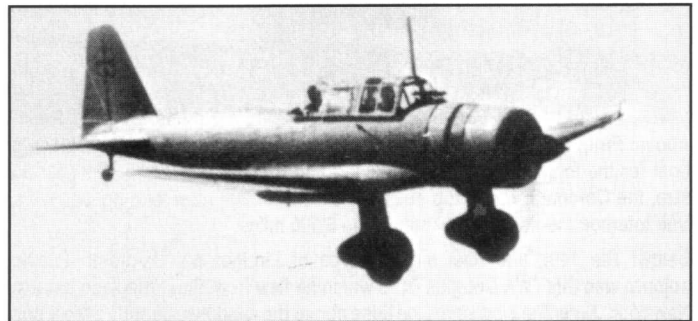
After 30 minutes they headed back over the open ocean for their long journey back. Suddenly, appearing above them from the clouds, a Japanese Zero dove on Smith who climbed to avoid his attacker. The Zero then shifted his attack to Lindbergh who could not dive to escape. He was too close to the ground. He pushed his throttle all the way forward in an attempt to outrun his pursuer. The Zero had gained speed while diving and Lindbergh could not escape him. In *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh*, he relates this life threatening episode. "I am not high enough to dive. It is useless to out-run the Zero. I must depend on speed, armorplate and other members of my flight. I nose down a little and keep on turning to avoid giving him a no-deflection shot. He must have his guns on me I know, in perfect position on my tail. I hunch down in front of the armorplate and wait for the bullets to hit. I think of Anne and the children. My body is braced and tense. There is an eternity of time. The world was never clearer. But there is no sputtering of an engine, no fragments flying off the wing, no shattering of glass on the instrument board in front of me". MacDonald saw the Zero firing on Lindbergh, but miraculously the Zero missed. They returned to their base at 1600 hours.

News of Lindbergh's close call and reports that he had shot down a Japanese plane began to spread throughout the South Pacific. The Passaic *Herald News* printed a story about his exploits, probably brought back by a returning airman. As a



Above: Summoned to Brisbane, Australia in July, 1944, Lindbergh reported to Fifth Fighter Command Headquarters to clarify his mission with Command authorities who were beginning to question the logic of his flying combat missions. He was able to convince Gen. George C. Kenney (right), Commander of allied forces in the Pacific to let him continue assisting combat squadrons with his operational improvements. Note complete lack of military insignia on Lindbergh's uniform other than the standard-issue 'U.S.' collar brass.

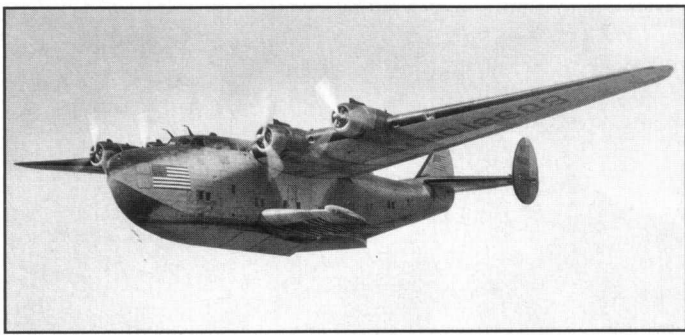
Below: Lindbergh's single controversial combat kill occurred on July 28, 1944 when a Mitsubishi Ki 51 Sonia like the one shown here attempted a head-on collision pass with Lindbergh's P-38 after a nearly-thirty minute dogfight off the coast of the Dutch Island of Ceram. Veteran Japanese pilot Capt. Saburo Shimada of the 73rd Independent Chutai was shot down after engaging two American fighter squadrons in a duel to the finish, eventually being hit by bullets from Lindbergh's Lightning, and plunging into the ocean below.



Right: The late Col. Charles H. MacDonald, Commander of the 475th Fighter Group 'Satan's Angels', became close friends with Charles Lindbergh after the two pilots shared many combat missions together, and Lindbergh had proved his mettle against pilots half his age. MacDonald was the fifth highest-ranking ace in the Army Air Corps having amassed a total of 27 aerial victories.

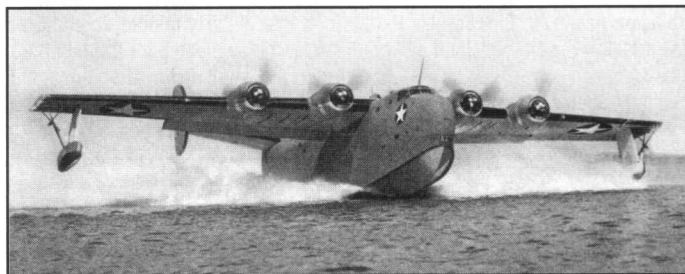


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Above: Lindbergh's long journey home began with this Boeing 314 Clipper operated by Pan American World Airways. Shown here in wartime camouflage, the giant flying boat sported no less than six large American flags on its flanks to identify itself to friendly forces when flying into allied locations. The 314 was the Concorde of its day, as travelling aboard her was a unique experience reserved only for the financially well-endowed.

Below: Douglas's first successful four-engine transport was the C-54 Skymaster, shown here over San Francisco. With a cruising speed of 170 mph, and payload of 20,000 pounds, the Skymaster made for an ideal long-ranged military transport. Lindbergh flew on a C-54 from Guadalcanal to Tarawa and Kwajalein Island.



Above: From Kwajalein, Lindbergh boarded a Martin PB2Y-3 Coronado flying boat for the long trip to Johnston Island and then Oahu, Hawaii. Fast for its size, the Coronado had a top speed in excess of 200 mph, and possessed a true intercontinental range of more than 3,500 miles.

Below: The 14th, and final airplane type of Lindbergh's six-month Pacific sojourn was this TWA Douglas DC-3 which he flew from San Francisco back to New York. Note *The Lindbergh Line* titles above the windows, denoting the 'Lone Eagle's' previous route-proving contributions to the then-fledgling airline.



result, Gen. George C. Kenney, commanding General of the Fifth Air Corps, informed Lindbergh he could no longer fly combat missions, but Charles had already decided to start the long journey home.

On August 15th, General Paul Wurtsmith, commanding the Fifth Fighter Command asked him to talk to fighter squadrons based on Noemfoor Island, Saidor, and Wadke about fuel economy techniques, and on August 19th, he traveled to Nazdab. After conferring with various officers, he traveled the next day to Brisbane as a passenger on a C-47 transport. As was his custom, he piloted the aircraft for one hour, as no aircraft commander would ever refuse to let Charles Lindbergh fly his airplane. Landing in Brisbane, he had a problem clearing Immigration because he had no passport. However, as Lindbergh later recalled, "The officer was good humored and winked through the papers".

On August 22nd, Lindbergh once again visited Gen. Douglas MacArthur. He and MacArthur's wife, Jean Marie, had met on board ship together with Charles's mother, back in 1929. MacArthur asked him about the maximum range he could expect from his fighter aircraft, and they discussed Lindbergh's recent encounter with the enemy. MacArthur asked him how many planes he had shot down, and Lindbergh replied, "One". "Where was it?" the General asked. "Off the coast of Ceram", Lindbergh answered. "Good you got one", said MacArthur.

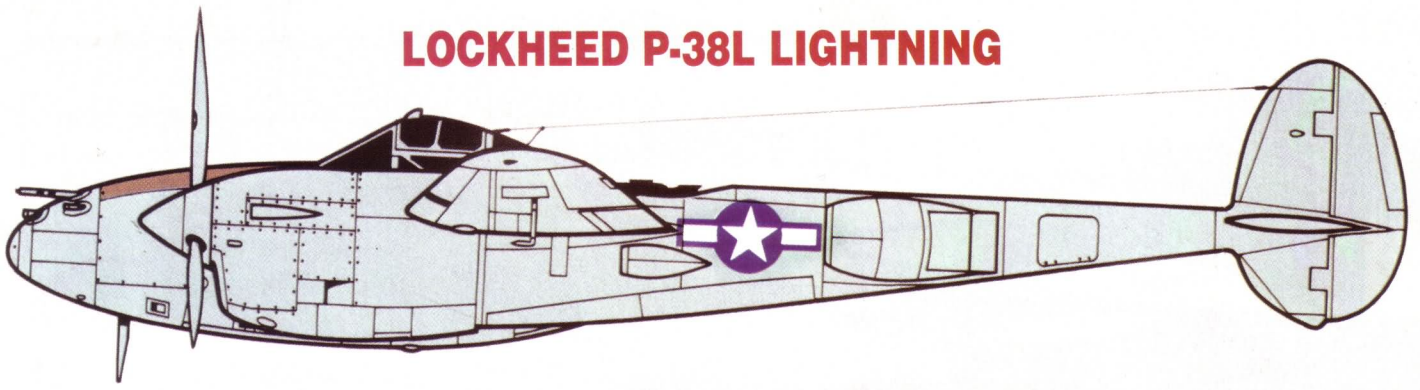
On August 25th, he flew aboard a Pan American flying boat and landed at Espiritu Santo after a six and one-half hour flight, continuing on to Guadalcanal. On Wednesday, August 30th, he departed Guadalcanal for Tarawa, flying in a Douglas C-54. There, he was given a tour of the island that had been the scene of so much bloodshed, and he saw American graves everywhere. Then on to Kwajalein to visit the Marine squadrons there and inquire about the performance of the Corsair. Fortunately, the Marine flyers on Kwajalein had seen no combat as the U.S. naval carrier forces had shot down virtually all the Japanese aircraft in the area.

He went to visit one of the Marine squadrons based on Roi Island and was invited to go on a dive-bombing mission with them. Their target was Taroa Island where they encountered some small arms fire during the bomb run before returning to base on Roi Island. Lindbergh's very last mission was an experimental flight where he carried a total bomb load of 4,000 lbs. - one 2,000-lb. bomb and two 1,000-lb. bombs. This was probably the heaviest bomb load ever carried by a single-engine fighter in WWII. The target was a naval gun installation on Wotje Island, and he completely wiped out a portion of the gun position and heavily damaged its steel-reinforced structure.

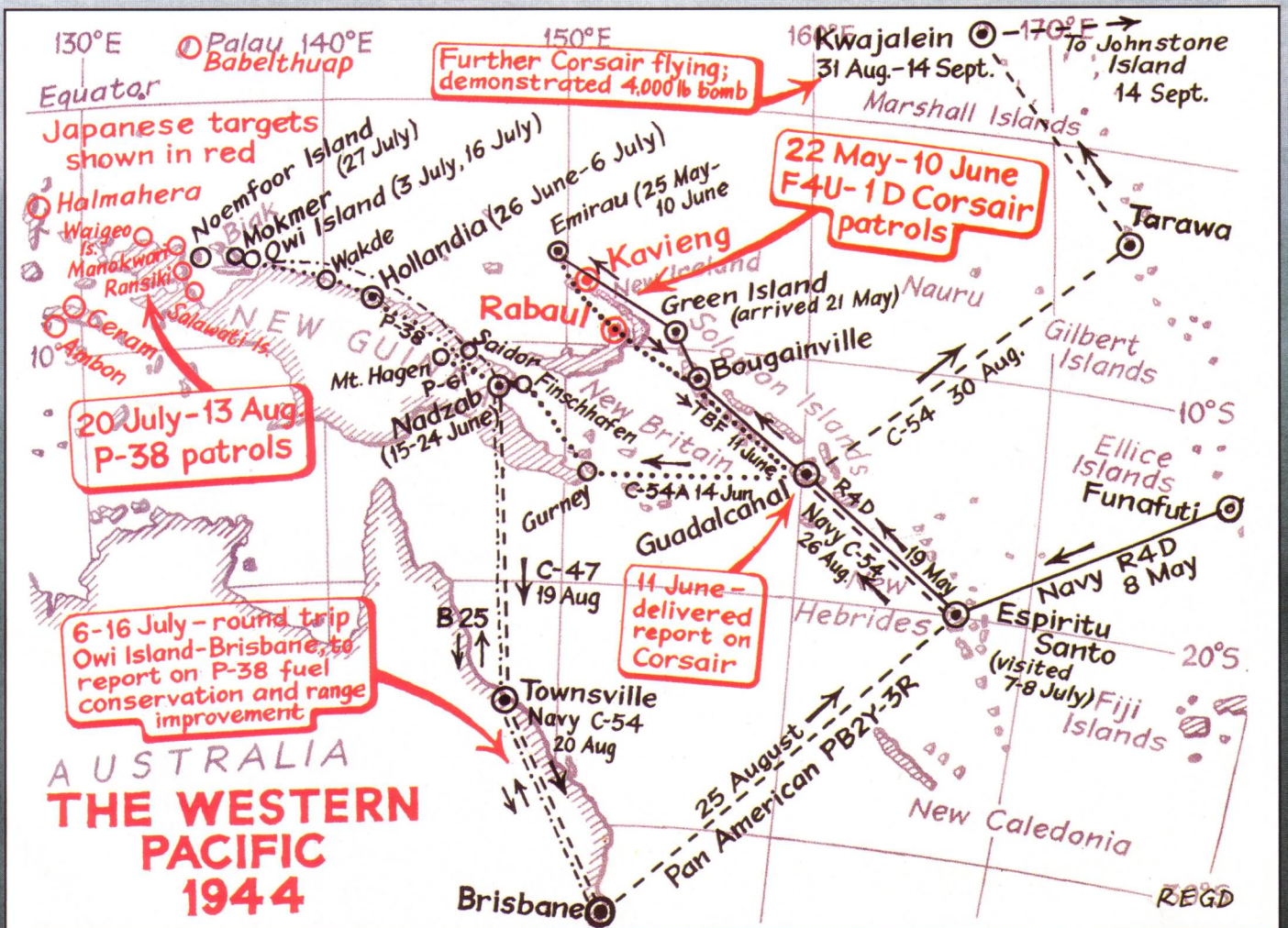
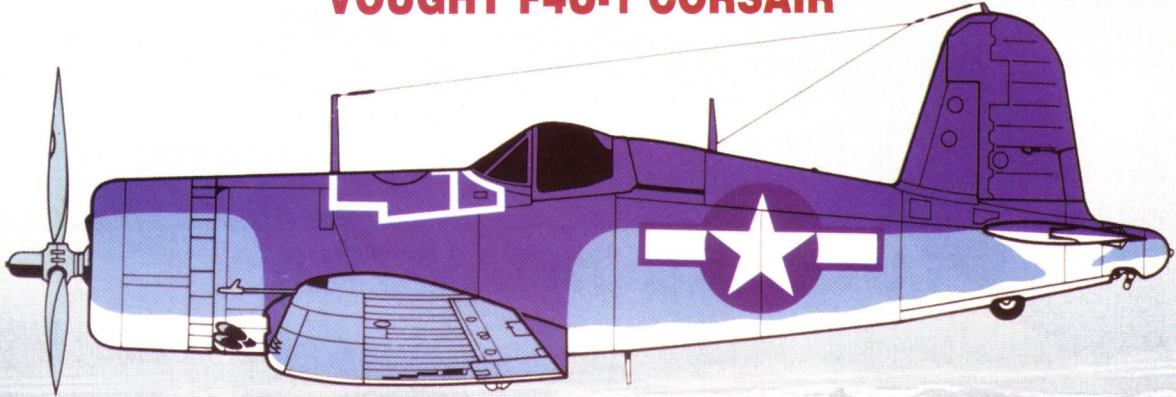
On Saturday, September 14, 1944, he boarded a PB2Y-3 four-engine flying boat and flew to Johnston Island where they refueled and departed for Hawaii. Lindbergh flew the aircraft for an hour before landing on Oahu. On September 16th, he arrived in San Francisco and boarded a TWA flight for New York the following Monday. He piloted this commercial flight also for about an hour enroute to Chicago, although passengers were unaware that for awhile, their pilot was the famous Charles Lindbergh. In a sign of the times, the flight was cancelled at Pittsburgh because of bad weather, and in a most ironic twist, after having successfully flown halfway around the world and back, the world's greatest aviator had to travel the final 400 miles to New York by train! 🚂

For additional reading about Lindbergh's experiences in World War II, see August 1978 *WINGS* and November 1981 *AIRPOWER*, both available in back issue. For more on the airplanes flown during the epic career of America's most famous airman, read **CHARLES LINDBERGH, An Airman, his Aircraft, and his Great Flights** by R.E.G. Davies, published by Paldwr Press, \$30.00, 1906 Wilson Lane #101, McLean, VA 22102, or order by FAX (703) 357-3937.

LOCKHEED P-38 LIGHTNING



VOUGHT F4U-1 CORSAIR



Map showing Lindbergh's trans-Pacific journeys and combat missions. (Courtesy of R.E.G. Davies, used by permission).