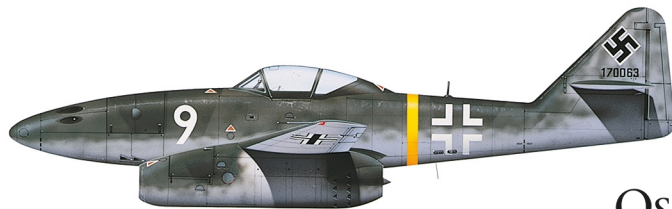


# WORLD WAR II FIGHTER PLANES SPOTTER'S GUIDE



OSPREY

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**OSPREY**  
PUBLISHING



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Tony Holmes

OSPREY PUBLISHING  
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc  
PO Box 883, Oxford, OX1 9PL, UK  
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland  
1385 Broadway, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10018, USA  
E-mail: [info@ospreypublishing.com](mailto:info@ospreypublishing.com)  
[www.ospreypublishing.com](http://www.ospreypublishing.com)

OSPREY is a trademark of Osprey Publishing Ltd

First published in Great Britain in 2021

This electronic edition published in 2021 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: PB 978 1 4728 4851 2;  
eBook 978 1 4728 4850 5;  
ePDF 978 1 4728 4852 9;  
XML 978 1 4728 4853 6

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#### CONVERSION TABLE

1 millimetre (mm)	0.0394in
1 centimetre (cm)	0.3937in
1 metre (m)	1.0936 yards
1 kilometre (km)	0.6214 miles
1 kilogram (kg)	2.2046 lb
1 inch (in)	2.54cm
1 foot (ft)	0.3048m
1 yard	0.9144m
1 mile	1.609km

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# AVIA B 534

The B 534 biplane evolved from the limited-production B 34 of 1932 and became the most successful Czechoslovakian fighter design of the interwar period. Both aircraft were the work of Avia's gifted aeronautical engineer František Novotný, who trialled several different engines in slightly modified B 34 airframes before settling on the license-built Hispano-Suiza 12Ydrs V12. The resulting single-bay biplane prototype completed its maiden flight on 25 May 1933, and the aircraft was ordered into series production for the Czechoslovak Air Force shortly thereafter. Despite its increasing obsolescence, the B 534 would be built by Avia through to 1939, by which time 568 aircraft had been completed in five variants.

The B 534-I, with guns mounted in the wings and on the fuselage, was the first to enter service in October 1935. The follow-on B 534-II had all four guns mounted in blisters on either side of the fuselage, and some examples also had a bubble canopy. The B 534-III of 1937 featured aerodynamic refinements, including mudguard spats for the fixed undercarriage and

streamlining of the front carburettor air intake. The B 534-IV that quickly followed was the major production variant, with Avia completing 272 examples of the aircraft. It had various refinements that pushed the fighter's top speed to 252mph. The final variant was the Bk 534, which was supposed to be fitted with a cannon firing through the propeller hub, but Avia had to stick with an extra machine gun due to installation issues with the weapon. Only 35 Bk 534s were built.

When Germany occupied Czechoslovakia in March 1939, more than 450 B/Bk 534s were commandeered by the Luftwaffe. The aircraft were briefly used as fighters and then trainers, and three frontline squadrons of the newly formed Slovak Air Force were also equipped with the aircraft. They would see action on the Eastern Front from June 1941. The Bulgarian Air Force also received 78 B 534-IVs from German stocks, and these aircraft tried to oppose the early USAAF bombing raids on the Ploesti oilfields. Finally, Greece and Yugoslavia had been export customers for the B 534 pre-war.

## SPECIFICATIONS (B 534-IV)

**Crew:** Pilot

**Length:** 26ft 7in (8.1m)

**Wingspan:** 30ft 10in (9.4m)

**Height:** 10ft 4in (3.15m)

**Empty:** 3,219lb (1,460kg)

**Max T/O:** 4,365lb (1,980kg)

**Max speed:** 252mph (405km/h)

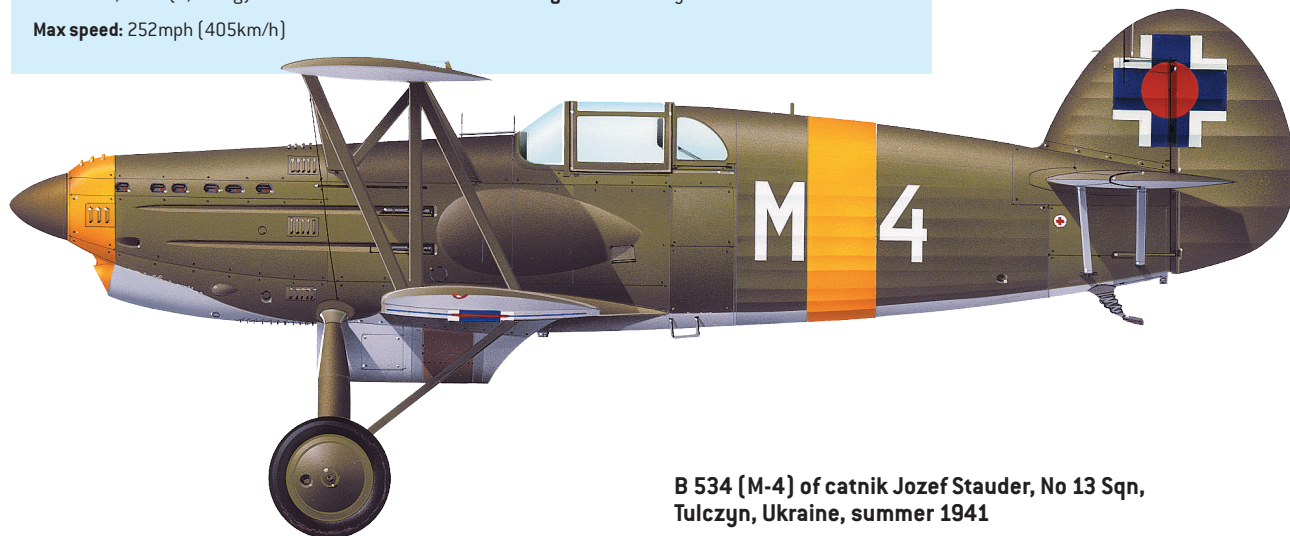
**Range:** 370 miles (600km)

**Powerplant:** Hispano-Suiza 12Ydrs

**Output:** 849hp (633kW)

**Armament:** Four 7.92mm machine guns in fuselage; six 22lb (10kg) or four 44lb (20kg) bombs under wings

**First Flight Date:** 25 May 1933



**B 534 (M-4) of catnik Jozef Stauder, No 13 Sqn, Tulczyn, Ukraine, summer 1941**

## FIGHTER DETAILS

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**Previous page:** Up until 1942, the B 534 was the standard equipment of Slovakian fighter units. This particular aircraft displays the Slovakian Air Arms (*Slovenske vzdušne zbrane*) camouflage scheme, with the wing upper surfaces and fuselage sides in khaki overall, and the wing and fuselage undersurfaces in light blue. The aircraft also has the yellow markings displayed by all Axis aircraft on the Eastern Front. 'Jozo' Stauder did not score any victories with the B 534, gaining all 12 of his kills in Bf 109s in 1943.

**This page:** This aircraft was one of four obsolete B 534s operated by the insurgent Combined Squadron. It was flown by former members of No 13 Sqn, including Frantisek Cyprich, who had claimed 12 Soviet aircraft shot down. Flying a B 534 during the Slovak uprising against their former German allies, 'Fero' Cyprich shot down a Hungarian Ju 52/3m transport – the last ever kill to be scored by a biplane with a fixed undercarriage. This aircraft, which displays insurgent markings, has part of its canopy missing.

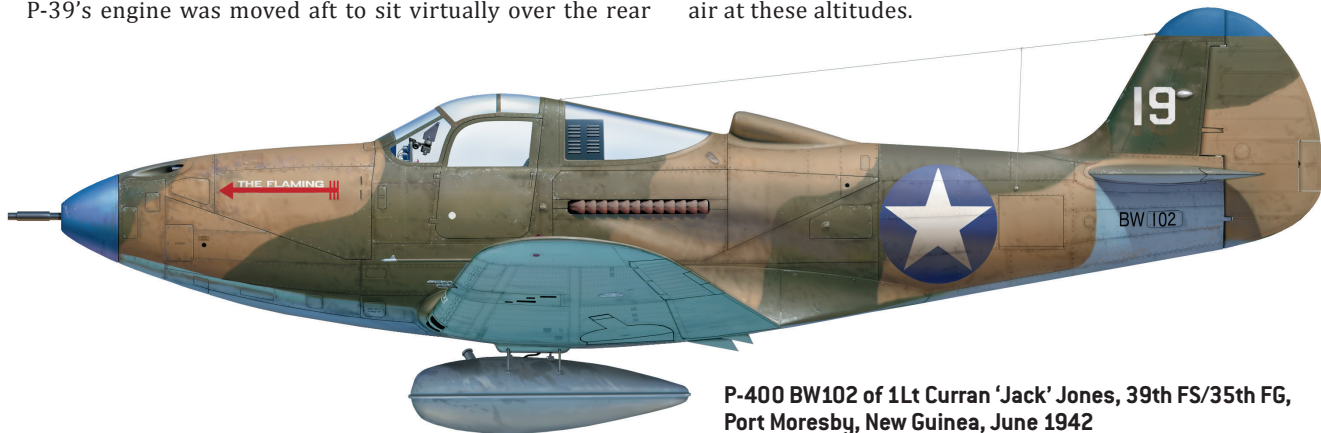


**B 534 No 217 (S-18) of zastavnik Frantisek Cyprich, Combined Squadron (*Kombinovana letka*), Tri Duby, central Slovakia, August–September 1944**

# BELL P-39 AIRACOBRA

Bell's revolutionary P-39 introduced the concept of both the centrally mounted powerplant and the tricycle undercarriage to single-engined fighters, the aircraft's unusual configuration stemming from its principal armament, the propeller hub-mounted T9 37mm cannon. In order to allow the weapon to be housed in the nose, the P-39's engine was moved aft to sit virtually over the rear

half of the wing centre-section. This drastically shifted the fighter's centre of gravity, thus forcing designers to adopt a tricycle undercarriage. Unfortunately, the P-39's radical design was not matched by stunning performance figures, particularly at heights exceeding 14,000ft, where its normally aspirated Allison V-1710 struggled in the 'thinner' air at these altitudes.



**P-40 BW102 of 1Lt Curran 'Jack' Jones, 39th FS/35th FG, Port Moresby, New Guinea, June 1942**

Astonishingly, following a service evaluation of the YP-39 in 1938–39, Bell was told by US Army Air Corps and National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics officials that a turbocharged version of the V-1710 that was then available for the Airacobra was not needed! Once the fighter entered service in 1941 the wisdom of this decision was quickly called into question. Indeed, so compromised was the aircraft's operability in its designated role that the P-39 (and the P-400, which was an export version of the aircraft fitted with a 20mm cannon – 128 P-400s were used by the USAAF after the RAF cancelled its order) was soon relegated to close air support duties in theatres where other aircraft could be employed as fighters. Operating at much lower altitudes over the Eastern Front, the Soviet Air Force did, however, achieve great aerial success with the Bell fighter, utilizing some 5,000 from 1942 onwards.

## SPECIFICATIONS (P-39D/N)

---

**Crew:** Pilot

**Length:** 30ft 2in (9.19m)

**Wingspan:** 34ft 0in (10.36m)

**Height:** 11ft 10in (3.61m)

**Empty:** 5,645lb (2,560kg)

**Max T/O:** 8,300lb (3,765kg)

**Max speed:** 386mph (621km/h)

**Range:** 650 miles (1,046km)

**Powerplant:** Allison V-1710-85

**Output:** 1,200hp (895kW)

**Armament:** P-39D/N – One 37mm cannon and two 0.50in machine guns in nose, two or four 0.30in machine guns in wings, one 500lb (227kg) bomb; P-390 – two underwing 0.50in machine guns replaced wing-mounted 0.30in guns

**First Flight Date:** 6 April 1938 (XP-39)

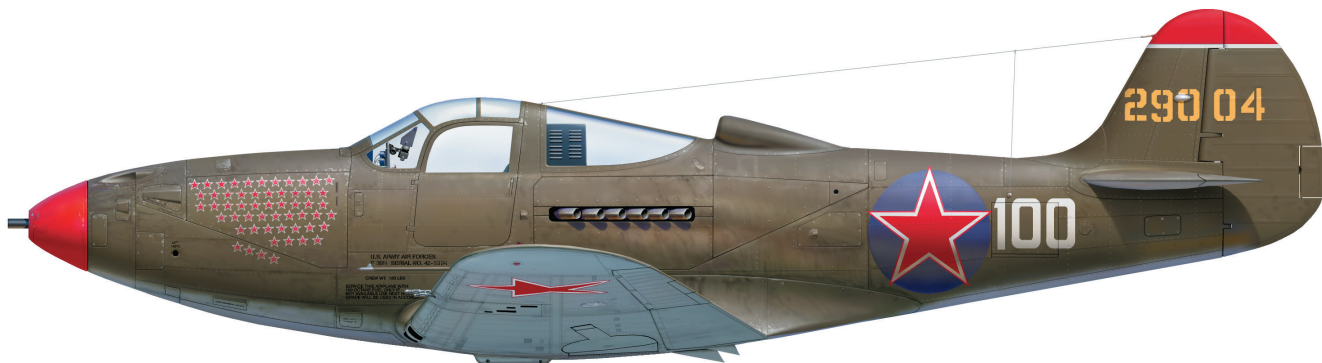
**P-39N-0 42-9004 of Col Aleksandr Ivanovich Pokryshkin,  
9th GIAD, Germany, spring 1945**

## FIGHTER DETAILS

---

**Page 13:** Future five-victory ace 'Jack' Jones is known to have regularly flown this P-400 during the 35th FG's first tour of operations in mid-1942. Indeed, he may well have used it to claim his sole Airacobra kill (a Zero-sen) on the morning of 9 June. Like most other P-400s from the 39th FS, BW102 was transferred to the 80th FS in July 1942.

**This page:** Three-time Hero of the Soviet Union (HSU) Col Aleksandr Pokryshkin, with 59 officially credited individual victories (55 of which are marked with red stars on the nose of this aircraft), was the second-ranking Allied ace of World War II. While 'Bort 100' seems to have been the number used by commanders of several different regiments and divisions for their assigned fighters, Pokryshkin had always marked his machines in such a way from his first days in action in 1941.



# BELL P-63 KINGCOBRA

Although the P-63 looked like an enlarged Airacobra, it was in fact an all-new design that had a superior turn of speed at all altitudes. The fighter drew heavily on modifications incorporated into the P-39's original replacement, the cancelled XP-39E. However, unlike the latter aircraft, the P-63 was more than just an Airacobra fuselage with new semi-laminar flow wings. The Kingcobra, as it was appropriately named, was appreciably larger and featured an Allison V-1710-93 engine (P-63A) that could be boosted to 1,500hp in flight in the event of an emergency.

Although 3,300 examples were built in several different versions, by the time the first production P-63s began to reach the USAAF in October 1943, the P-51B Mustang, P-38H Lightning and P-47C Thunderbolt had successfully filled the USAAF's requirement for a frontline fighter. Most P-63s were therefore made available for lend-lease purchase, and the Soviet Air Force happily snapped up more than 2,400 examples.

## SPECIFICATIONS (P-63C)

---

**Crew:** Pilot

**Length:** 32ft 8in (9.96m)

**Wingspan:** 38ft 4in (11.68m)

**Height:** 12ft 7in (3.84m)

**Empty:** 6,375lb (2,892kg)

**Max T/O:** 10,500lb (4,763kg)

**Max Speed:** 410mph (660km/h)

**Range:** 2,200 miles (3,540km) with external fuel tanks

**Powerplant:** Allison V-1710-93

**Output:** 1,325hp (988kW)

**Armament:** One 37mm cannon and two 0.50in machine guns in nose; two underwing 0.50in machine guns; up to three 500lb (227kg) bombs

**First Flight Date:** 7 December 1942

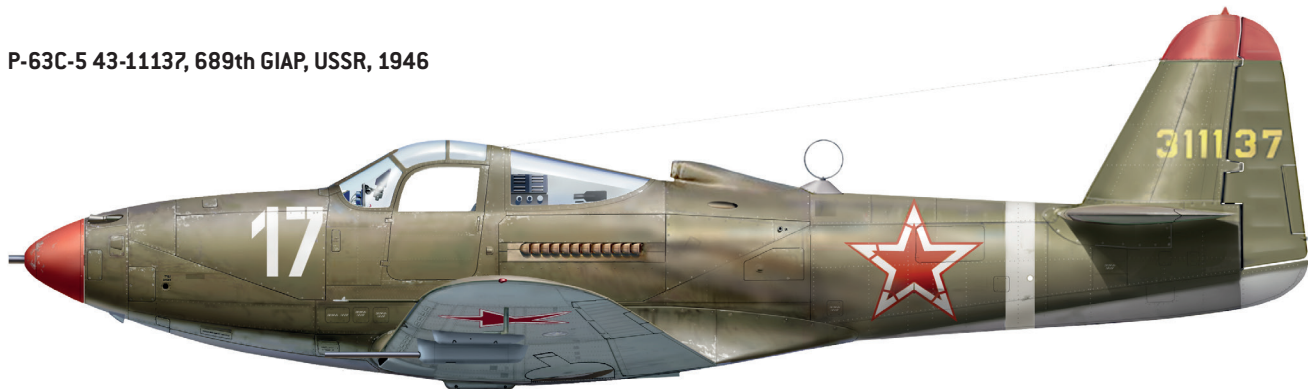
A further 300 went to Free French units in the Mediterranean, but the primary customer – the USAAF – restricted its use of the Kingcobra to training squadrons in America. The final variant in production at war's end was the P-63E, of which only 13 from an order for 2,930 had been delivered when the contract was cancelled in the wake of VJ Day.

## FIGHTER DETAILS

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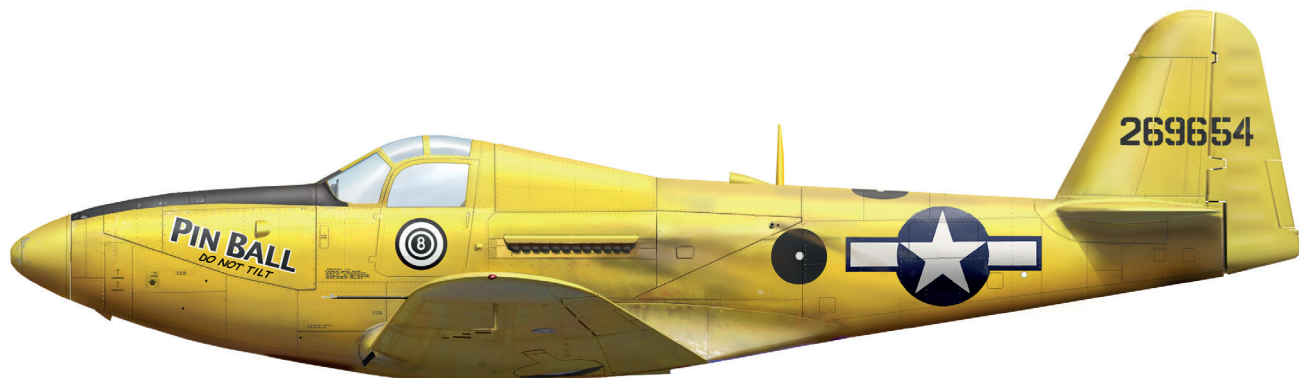
**This Page:** 43-11137 was one of 2,421 Kingcobras supplied to the Soviet Union from June 1944, these aircraft being the last US fighters provided to the USSR in World War II. Only a handful of P-63s had made it to the frontline by the spring of 1945, and none were used in combat, as the units they were assigned to were fully occupied flying ground support missions during the Battle of Berlin.

**P-63C-5 43-11137, 689th GIAP, USSR, 1946**



**This Page:** One of more than 300 surplus P-63s converted into aerial 'targets' for the training of USAAF bomber gunners, 42-69654 was fitted with thickened cockpit glass and strengthened wings and forward fuselage panels armoured with special aluminium alloy. The Kingcobras of the 'Pinball'

programme were all set to be widely used by Army Air Forces Training Command when VJ Day put a halt to the conversions. A few trained B-29 gunners post-war, but all RP-63s had been mothballed by the end of 1947.



**RP-63A-11 42-69654, 2126th Base Unit, Laredo, Texas, 1945**

# BELL P-59 AIRACOMET

America's first jet fighter, the Bell P-59 was built around the revolutionary Whittle turbojet that had been unveiled to the US government by Britain in September 1941. Of conventional design, and with a straight wing, the Bell fighter was powered by two Americanized General Electric Type IAs (subsequently

redesignated J31). Flight development went smoothly, with three prototypes (XP-59A) and 13 evaluation airframes (YP-59A) being delivered by late 1944.

**YP-59A 42-108777, Muroc Army Airfield, California, 1944**



## SPECIFICATIONS (P-59A)

**Crew:** Pilot

**Length:** 38ft 10in (11.83m)

**Wingspan:** 45ft 6in (13.97m)

**Height:** 12ft 4in (3.76m)

**Empty:** 8,165lb (3,704kg)

**Max T/O:** 13,700lb (6,214kg)

**Max Speed:** 413mph (665km/h)

**Range:** 525 miles (845km)

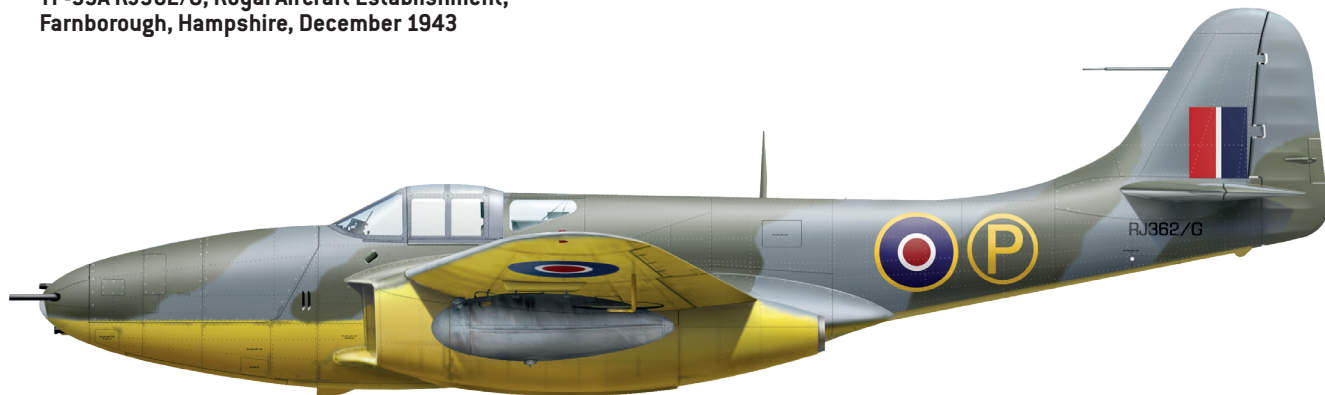
**Powerplant:** two General Electric J31-GE-3/5 turbojets

**Output:** 4,000lb st (18.0kN)

**Armament:** One 37mm cannon and three 0.50in machine guns in nose; two underwing racks for bombs or drop tanks

**First Flight Date:** 1 October 1942

**YP-59A RJ362/G, Royal Aircraft Establishment,  
Farnborough, Hampshire, December 1943**



It was soon realized at an early stage of the flight development programme that the Airacomet's performance was in fact inferior to many frontline piston-engined fighters of the day. This consigned the 66 production aircraft that were subsequently built by Bell to the fighter trainer role. The first of 20 production P-59As was delivered to the USAAF in August 1944, and three of these aircraft were duly supplied to the US Navy as the XF2L-1. The P-59B replaced the A-model soon after, and a further 30 were delivered before the remaining 50 on order (plus an expected follow-on batch of a further 250) were cancelled in October 1944.

## FIGHTER DETAILS

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**Page 19:** YP-59A 42-108777, adorned with the titling *Bell Aircraft Corp* on its nose, was the last of seven aircraft built as part of Contract AC 21931 SA1 (42-108771 through -108777) placed on 26 March 1942. 42-108777 was acquired post-war by the Planes of Fame Air Museum of Chino, California, and it is presently undergoing a long-running restoration to airworthiness.

**Previous page:** Built as YP-59A 42-108773, this aircraft was exchanged with the RAF for the first production Gloster Meteor F I EE210. The Airacomet arrived in Britain in September 1943 and was given the serial RJ362/G, with the 'G' indicating that the aircraft needed to be guarded at all times when it was on the ground away from its home at the Engine Research Flight at Farnborough. It was shipped back to the USA in early 1945 and sold for scrapping shortly thereafter.

# BLOCH MB.152

The most populous member of the French Bloch MB.150 family of single-seat fighters developed in the second half of the 1930s, the MB.152 combined the proven all-metal structure of the very similar MB.151 (of which 144 were built) with the latest version of Gnome-Rhône's tried and tested 14N radial engine – the latter, oddly, was canted slightly to port. Better armament was also fitted to the new Bloch fighter, and the first of 482 built for the *Armée de l'Air* entered service in April 1939. Subsequent deliveries proved to be slow, however, and those in the frontline suffered from poor serviceability.

Nevertheless, no fewer than nine fighter groups possessed MB.152s at the time of the German invasion of France on 10 May 1940, and although the fighter suffered heavy attrition (86 were lost in action), MB.152 pilots were credited with the destruction of 146 Luftwaffe aircraft prior to France's capitulation on 30 June 1940. The aircraft continued to see

## SPECIFICATIONS (BLOCH MB.152C-1)

---

**Crew:** Pilot

**Length:** 29ft 10in (9.10m)

**Wingspan:** 34ft 7in (10.54m)

**Height:** 9ft 11in (3.02m)

**Empty:** 4,758lb (2,158kg)

**Max T/O:** 6,173lb (2,800kg)

**Max Speed:** 320mph (515km/h)

**Range:** 525 miles (845km)

**Powerplant:** Gnome-Rhône GR 14N-25

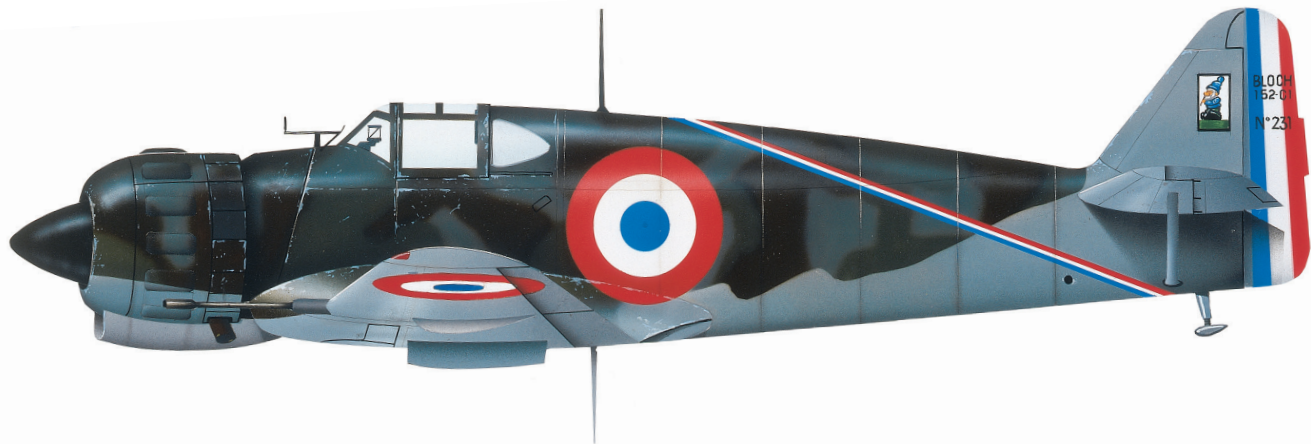
**Output:** 1,080hp (806kW)

**Armament:** Two 20mm cannon and two 7.5mm machine guns in nose, or four 7.5mm machine guns in wings

**First Flight Date:** 15 December 1938

service with six fighter groups of the Vichy French for a further two years, and small numbers also flew with the Luftwaffe as advanced trainers and with the Romanian Air Force. The Greek Air Force was the sole export customer for the MB.151, and it had received nine of the 25 examples it had ordered when the French capitulation to Germany in June 1940 put a stop to further deliveries. These aircraft scored several aerial victories over the Luftwaffe prior to being shot down on 19 April 1941.

**MB.152C-1 No 231 of Cne Marius Ambrogi, *Groupe de Chasse* I/8, Claye-Souilly, France, June 1940**



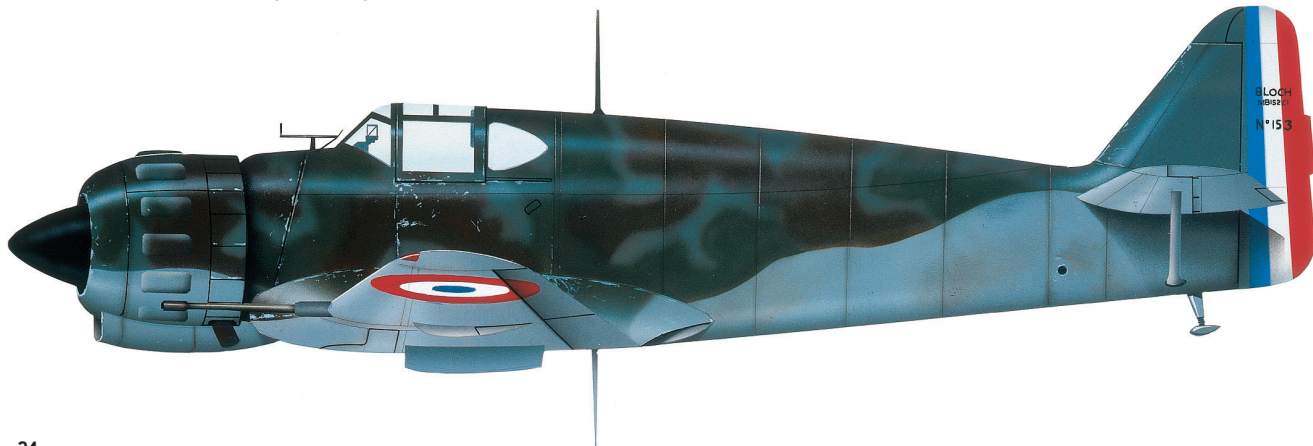
## FIGHTER DETAILS

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**Previous page:** This aircraft was flown by 15-victory World War I ace Cne Marius Ambrogi and wore a tricolour band on the fuselage to denote his status. Ambrogi downed a Do 17 bomber during the Battle of France. The emblem on the tail of the aircraft is 'Dopey', one of Disney's Seven Dwarfs.

**MB.152C-1 No 153 of Sous Lt Robert Thollon,  
*Groupe de Chasse I/8, Claye-Souilly, France, June 1940***

**This page:** The camouflage and markings that adorn this aircraft are typical of the dull colours applied to the majority of MB.152s in 1940. Sous Lt Robert Thollon claimed all eight of his victories during the Battle of France, and following the Armistice with Germany, he spent the rest of the war as an instructor at a mountain sports training school. He also worked closely with the resistance movement. Thollon was killed in a mountain-climbing accident in 1948.



# BOULTON PAUL DEFIANT

The final result of the turret fighter concept favoured by the RAF in the 1930s, the Defiant enjoyed a less than successful career as a frontline fighter in the dangerous skies over southern England during the summer of 1940. Built to combine the strengths of new monoplane fighter designs such as the Hurricane and Spitfire with the latest in turret weaponry, the Defiant was seen as an effective bomber destroyer. However,

once in action, the aircraft struggled against single-seat opposition, both in terms of speed and agility, due to the weight of its two-man crew and bulky armament.

Entering squadron service in December 1939, the Defiant initially enjoyed some success against Luftwaffe opposition surprised by its turret armament. However, once Bf 109 pilots in particular learned that the aircraft had no forward-firing

**Defiant I L7013/PS-U of Plt Off  
E G Barwell, No 264 Sqn, Fowlmere,  
Cambridgeshire, July 1940**



## SPECIFICATIONS (DEFIANT I)

---

**Crew:** Pilot and turret gunner

**Length:** 35ft 4in (10.77m)

**Wingspan:** 39ft 4in (12.00m)

**Height:** 12ft 2in (3.70m)

**Empty:** 6,078lb (2,757kg)

**Max T/O:** 8,318lb (3,773kg)

**Max Speed:** 304mph (489km/h)

**Range:** 465 miles (748km)

**Powerplant:** Rolls-Royce Merlin III

**Output:** 1,030hp (768kW)

**Armament:** Four 0.303in machine guns  
in dorsal turret

**First Flight Date:** 11 August 1937



Defiant I N3328/DZ-Z of Sgt H E Bodien in the nightfighter role, No 151 Sqn, Wittering, Cambridgeshire, February 1941

guns, they tailored their tactics accordingly and inflicted heavy losses on the Defiant units off the Dunkirk evacuation beaches and during the early stages of the Battle of Britain. Removed from daylight operations by late August 1940, surviving Defiant Is and new Mk IIs eventually equipped 13 newly formed nightfighter squadrons, and between the autumn of 1940 and early 1942, the aircraft enjoyed some nocturnal success.

## FIGHTER DETAILS

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**Page 25:** This aircraft flew from Duxford's satellite airfield at Fowlmere with No 264 Sqn during the early stages of the Battle of Britain. The following month the unit moved to Hornchurch, Essex, and when flying from here on 24 August L7013 was attacked by two Bf 109s and hit behind the turret by an explosive shell. Its pilot, Flt Lt E W Campbell-Colquhoun, managed to shake off his attackers and land at Manston, Kent. After being repaired, L7013 was relegated to training duties.

**Previous page:** N3328 was first flown by future ace Henry Bodien at the end of February 1941. The fighter was also routinely taken aloft by WO James Hopewell, who had become an ace flying Spitfires the previous summer. Like many other Defiants, N3328 (which was adorned with a very distinctive marking in the form of a sharksmouth, the origin of which remains unknown) later served in a training role. The fighter was written off in a crash in Yorkshire in October 1942.

# BREWSTER F2A BUFFALO

The first monoplane fighter to enter service with the US Navy, the F2A was designed for use aboard aircraft carriers. The first aircraft delivered by Brewster were 11 Wright Cyclone-powered F2A-1s, which were taken on strength in June 1939. Part of an order for 54 such aircraft, the remaining 43 Buffalos were instead supplied to the Finnish Air Force as the Model B-239. The follow-on F2A-2 and -3 proved more popular with the US Navy, as they featured the definitive Wright 1820-40 radial engine and armour protection for the pilot.

Although only 509 examples were built in total between 1938 and 1941, the F2A-2/3 enjoyed a modicum of export success when it was ordered as the B-339B/D/Es by the Belgian, Dutch and British governments as these nations attempted to bolster their air forces on the eve of war in Europe. Despite the Model 339s and Buffalo Is (as the type was named by the RAF) acquired by the latter two countries faring badly in combat against the Japanese in 1941–42, the Model B-239s flown by the Finns exacted a heavy toll on the Soviet Air Force

between 1941 and 1944. No fewer than 37 Finnish pilots became aces (claiming five or more aircraft shot down), resulting in the Brewster fighter being christened the ‘Pearl of the Skies’ by those that flew it.

## FIGHTER DETAILS

---

**Opposite page:** When the first Japanese air raid on Rangoon occurred on 23 December 1941, New Zealander Sgt Gordon ‘Willie’ Williams was already on patrol in this aircraft. Diving on a formation of Ki-21 ‘Sally’ heavy bombers, he downed one of them, probably destroyed another and damaged four more. Like Williams (who later flew Hurricanes with No 67 Sqn and made ten claims in total, including 3.5 destroyed), W8245 survived the Burma debacle and was evacuated to India to be used as a fighter trainer.