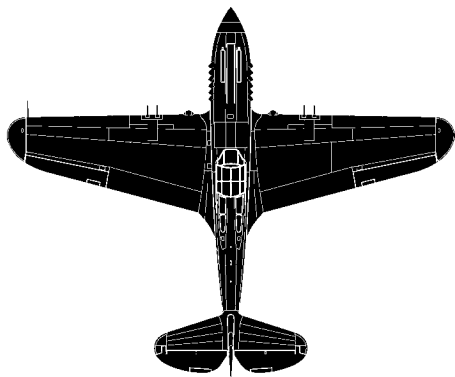


Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

P-40 Warhawk



The P-40 Warhawk, last of Curtiss' famous "Hawk" line, was the workhorse of US Army Air Forces tactical aviation early in World War II. The fighter was rugged and versatile. More importantly, it was available. It saw action on Dec. 7, 1941, at Pearl Harbor and bore the brunt of air combat in several theaters until the US could bring on more-advanced fighters.

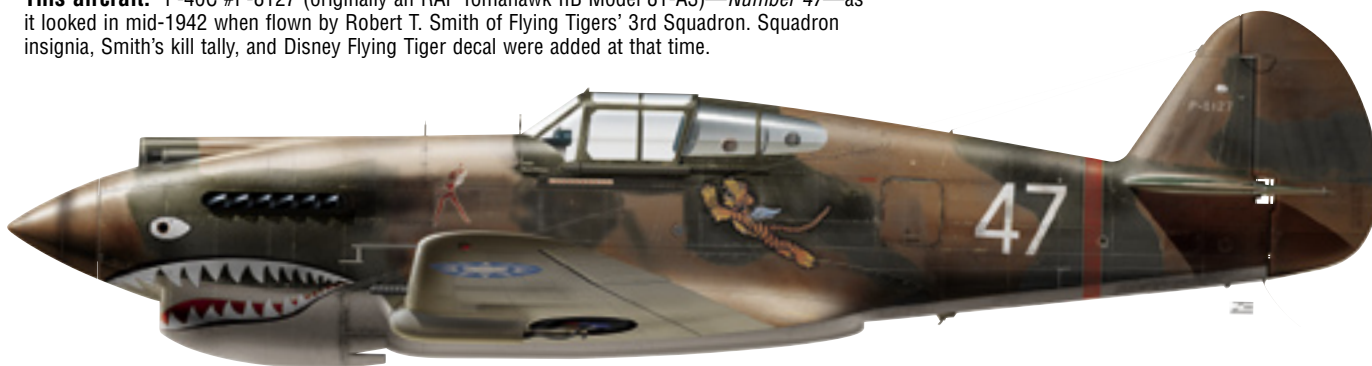
Starting in 1940, Curtiss produced 13,738 of these single-engine, single-seat aircraft. The final copy of the last major variant—the P-40N—left the plant on Nov. 30, 1944. Thousands went to allies. The US Army called its P-40s Warhawks; the RAF used the names Tomahawk and Kittyhawk for its variants.

While designed for low-level ground support, the P-40 was effective in air-to-air combat when used properly. Its most famous air

battles were fought by Maj. Gen. Claire L. Chennault's "Flying Tigers," the American Volunteer Group in China whose shark-mouth Tomahawks (acquired from an RAF order) tangled with Japanese fighters in late 1941 and 1942. In a six-month period, the Tigers' P-40s destroyed 286 Japanese airplanes and lost 22 pilots in combat. For the most part, the P-40's favorable reputation stems from those encounters.

The Warhawk did not have the speed, maneuverability, or climb rate of its adversaries, but it was fast in a dive and could take tremendous punishment. Many pilots owed their lives to its rugged frame. Eventually, more-capable fighters took over the air-combat role and the P-40 shifted mainly to ground-attack missions. However, the Warhawk will always be remembered for holding the fort in the air early in World War II, at a time of desperate US need.

This aircraft: P-40C #P-8127 (originally an RAF Tomahawk IIB Model 81-A3)—*Number 47*—as it looked in mid-1942 when flown by Robert T. Smith of Flying Tigers' 3rd Squadron. Squadron insignia, Smith's kill tally, and Disney Flying Tiger decal were added at that time.



In Brief

Designed, built by Curtiss-Wright ★ first flight 1938 ★ crew of 1 ★ number built 13,738 ★ later models could carry up to three bombs. **Specific to P-40C:** max speed 350 mph ★ cruise speed 280 mph ★ max range 904 miles ★ armament, 6 machine guns (four .30 cal and two .50 cal) ★ weight (loaded) 7,600 lb. ★ span 37 ft 4 in ★ length 31 ft 9 in ★ height 10 ft 4 in ★ one Allison V-12 engine.

Famous Fliers

Members of "Flying Tigers" and 23rd Fighter Group in China, including John R. Alison, Charles Bond, Bruce K. Holloway, David L. "Tex" Hill, Gregory Boyington; Tuskegee Airmen of 99th Fighter Squadron; Boyd Wagner, first USAAF ace of World War II; Donald S. Lopez, deputy director of the National Air & Space Museum.

Interesting Facts

April 1939 order for 524 P-40s was Air Corps' largest to date for a fighter ★ P-40s and P-36s first US fighters to engage Japanese forces (Pearl Harbor) ★ Built in eight major US variants ★ Featured in the famous film "God Is My Co-Pilot" (1945) ★ Served in 28 national air forces ★ First US fighter capable of speeds exceeding 300 mph.



Pictured l-r: Maj. John Alison, Maj. "Tex" Hill, Capt. Albert "Ajax" Baumler, and Lieutenant Mack Mitchell, who served with USAAF's 23rd Fighter Group in China.