

The King (Serial No. 19125741)

Photo from AP



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Photo from USAF

[1] First Lieutenant Gable with .50 cal slings, headed to firing practice in January 1943. [2] Now-Captain Gable at waist-gun position in England in June 1943. [3] Poster for "Combat America." [4] As Rhett Butler, with Vivien Leigh as Scarlett O'Hara, in "Gone with the Wind."

In 1941, Clark Gable was the undisputed King of Hollywood. He had won the Oscar for Best Actor in 1935, gained world fame for his role as Rhett Butler in "Gone with the Wind" in 1939, and was making a whopping \$30,000 per month. Then came World War II and Gable—like Jimmy Stewart, Henry Fonda, and other stars—responded. At 41, he enlisted in the Army Air Forces as a private. He earned a commission in 1942 and was assigned to Eighth Air Force in 1943. Trained as a waist gunner, Gable flew operational missions with 351st Bomb Group over Europe, firing at enemy fighters even as he obtained footage for "Combat America," an AAF film used in bond drives. Gable flew his last mission on Sept. 23, 1943. He returned to the US to edit the film and, though he hoped for new combat orders, they never came. Gable was discharged in 1944. When Maj. Clark Gable died in 1960, the former B-17 gunner received Air Force funeral honors.



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Photo from MGM