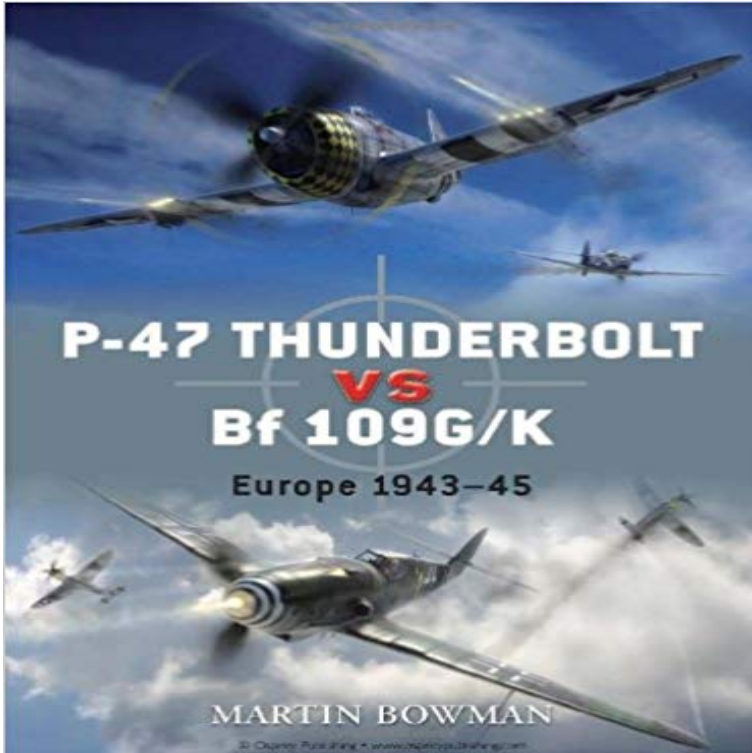


P-47 Thunderbolt vs Bf 109G/K: Europe 1943-45 (Duel)



The P-47 climbed like a homesick angel and dived for the deck like a rock. This was due to the mighty power of its air-cooled, turbo-supercharged Double Wasp engine, combined with a brutish barrel-shaped airframe. The deadly firepower was totally destructive. The worlds largest single-engined fighter when the USA entered the war, the P-47s 18 cylinders vibrated the whole aircraft like it was going to destroy itself. More Thunderbolts were built than any other American fighter in history. In December 1942, the P-47 was the only readily available American-produced high performance fighter. At altitudes up to 15,000 ft, its rival, the Bf 109G, had all-round better performance than the P-47C, most notably in rate of climb. The Thunderbolts performance progressively improved above 15,000 ft, and between 25,000 to 30,000 ft it surpassed those of the enemy fighters, except for rate of climb and acceleration - the P-47 was double the weight of a Bf 109. Although the latter could initially accelerate well in a dive, the P-47C soon overhauled it and easily out-dived the Messerschmitt from high altitudes. P-47 pilots were advised to avoid combats at low altitudes and slow speeds. Thunderbolt pilots were synonymous with the might of the Eighth Air Forces fighter strength from the summer of 1943 until the end of the conflict, during which time the P-47 was operated in the escort, ground strafing and dive-bombing roles. The P-47 was flown exclusively by Gabby Gabreski and Robert Johnson, the top two scoring American fighter aces in the ETO/MTO. All told, the Thunderbolt was flown by 18 of the top 30 American aces in Europe during the war, while the Bf 109G was the staple Defense of the Reich fighter from 1943 to wars end. The numerous aspects of the pilots training, the tactics they used once in combat and the leading edge technology employed by these second generation

World War 2 fighters is covered in detail, as is the continual development of both fighter types. Finally, the key elements of both fighters - the airframe, engine, armament and flying characteristics -are also explored through first hand accounts from the aces that went head-to-head in the war-torn skies of Europe.

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