



THE FLYING BULLS

PRESS INFORMATION

Lockheed P-38 "Lightning"

Reg. N25Y

In a famous homage to the Lockheed P-38 Lightning, the long-term owner Marvin 'Lefty' Gardner toyed with the idea of sending the plane to the angels in heaven after it was severely damaged in an accident. He says the plane has been like 'heaven on earth' for him. Luckily he decided differently: the best preserved P-38 in the world eventually made the long journey to Salzburg to be with its siblings at the Flying Bulls.

The P-38 was never a leisure plane or plane for 'Sunday pilots' as many Americans said. It was produced as a serious plane in serious times; as the American answer to the ME-109 of the German armed forces during the Second World War. During the late 1930s, Kelly Johnson developed a fighter in the form of the Lockheed which travelled 100 miles an hour faster than any US plane which went before it. Efficiency was everything. Instead of 2 cockpit seats and 1 engine, as was standard with all other models, this plane had 2 engines and 1 cockpit seat. This offered a high cruising range and autonomy. Provided that is that the engines worked – the Allison engines quickly acquired the reputation of being 'critical'.

Overall, the machine proved itself. General George Kenny, Commanding Officer for the South-West Pacific Area, described it as "my best method against the Japanese". The General was convinced that the P-38 shortened the Second World War by a year.

In September 1945, the P-38 F-5G-6-LO with serial number 44-53254 was dismissed from the Air Force and registered as civil aircraft N25Y by the Lilee Products Co. in Chicago. The time came to focus on the sporty side of life. And in particular following handover of the N25Y to J.D. Reed in Houston. J.D. Reed was an air racing enthusiast who was successful in recruiting equally passionate pilots, including Charlie 'Firewall' Walling.



At the same time, J.D. Reed worked to further optimise the speed of the plane from a modified carburettor cover to additional water injection and aerodynamically designed propellers and wing tips.

His enthusiasm and fine-tuning paid off. Walling achieved 2nd place at the 1947 Miami Air Races – and at the Sohio-Race in Cleveland in the same year. His main competitor said with astonishment that he had “never seen a P-38 fly so fast”. Success was more modest for pilot James P. Hagerstrom, who won 5th place in the Tinnermann Trophy Race.

During the 50s, sports flying was relatively low-key sport. Grand planes such as the N25Y were seen first and foremost as an ‘expensive topic of conversation’ and changes of ownership were almost more frequent than the flights themselves.

This changed in 1963 when the N25Y fell into the hands of Marvin ‘Lefty’ Gardner via Vernon Thorpe. Lefty Gardner had previously been a flying legend. His daredevil yet essential flights carrying supplies to the Norwegian Resistance movement were legendary. Yet Lefty also proved himself during peace times and established a successful company for agricultural flights. But most of all, he was passionate about flying as a sport. This emotion was reflected in his starting number which he changed from 25 to ‘Lucky 13’. Inspired by the former colours of the Confederate Air Force, he opted for a striking white colour bearing the nickname ‘White Lightning’ on the N25Y. Lefty even wrote a poem about the P-38 which ended with the words: "They say you can't take it with you / when you pass through the pearly gates / But I hope and pray that the angels above / want a ride in my P-38."

Lefty Gardner – according to flying partner Lloyd Nolen – is “one of the few people who were born to be both a mechanic and a pilot” and was immortalised in particular in the Reno National Championship Air Races. He attended for decades and hardly missed one. There were times when he won 2 out of 3 races. His greatest strength was ‘Precision Aerobatics’. Nobody could circle the pylon as elegantly as he could – and for many spectators, the unforgettable experience of seeing the ‘White Lightning’ complete a perfect circle was worth the visit alone.



However, in 2001 the White Lightning was struck down by an engine in flames. Lefty's son Ladd escaped by the skin of his teeth and managed to bring the plane down just in time in a cotton field in Mississippi. The white plane turned black and sustained substantial damaged.

But despite everything: 8 years later, the P-38 is back with a shiny new look as if it has just left the workshop. The timeless metallic look perfects the form of the magnificent double cantilever body. All thanks to the tireless commitment of the Flying Bulls crew. Following comprehensive restoration at Ezell Aviation in Breckenridge, came the special transportation from Texas to Central Europe.

Flying the whole journey across the North Atlantic would undoubtedly have been one of the most spectacular and adventurous journeys – and also one of the most risky. 3 hours with no landing option high above the ocean with a water temperature of 2° and metre-high waves, not to mention one human life and a legendary plane running only on the 'critical' Allison motors. For once, Flying Bulls former chief pilot Sigi Angerer had to put his understanding of flying before his passion.

Transportation of the proud Lightning in a container was to be avoided – no respected plane enthusiast would have the heart to do that. Following consideration of all the pros and cons, the decision was made to opt for a combination of flight/ship/flight. Of course, the ship required plenty of storage space to fit in this majestic aeroplane.

However, a pier is not a landing strip or runway. The distance between an airfield close to a harbour and the ship became a logistical and bureaucratic obstacle. The easiest was to travel via Pensacola, Florida to where the P-38 flew over 1,300 km from Texas. Here, dignified days of rest in the respectable company of other historical planes at the National Naval Aviation Museum were exchanged for a nerve-wracking truck-mounted crane ride when the street en route to the harbour became too narrow.



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The ship team on the 'Flintereems' will almost certainly be talking about this first for a long time – it's not every day they transport a theoretically airworthy plane. The stormy conditions out on the sea kept the technicians accompanying the machine very busy. No hint of deckchairs on the sun deck for this crossing. The heavy tension belts holding the plane in place had to be checked and adjusted several times a day.

The sea journey ended in Hamburg. Sigi Angerer received the plane in one piece and started the 2 Allison engines. Following a brief check and warm-up, it was time for take-off and the flight to Salzburg Airport.

The 88 minute flight was a real pleasure and the noise of the engines must have sounded like angels singing in Sigi's ears. And the dream that is the P-38 Lightning lives on in a paradise on earth: as a magnificent addition to the Flying Bulls.

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Technical Specifications

Lockheed P-38 "Lightning"

Registration	N25Y
Manufacturer	Lockheed
Year of construction	1944
S/N	AF44-53254
Power plant	2x Allison V1710-1111/113
Power	1.600 HP/PS each
Engine displacement	1710 cubic inches
Cruising speed	240 kts / 450 km/h
Max. speed	410 kts / 760 km/h
Service ceiling	44.000 ft / 13.410 m
Max. endurance	11 h
Range	1.955 nm / 3.620 km
Fuel Consumption	approx. 400 l/h
Wingspan	51,8 ft / 15,8 m
Length	37,7 ft / 11,5 m
Height	12,8 ft / 3,9 m
Empty Weight	13.265 lbs / 6.016 kg
MTOW	18.500 lbs / 8.390 kg /
Seats	1 Pilot