

THE ACE OF ACES

by

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Based on the true story of Major Richard Bong

INT. THE AMP BUILDING, GENERAL MACARTHUR'S OFFICE - DAY

General MacArthur greets Generals Kenney and Ennis as they enter his office.

KENNEY

I don't see how human beings can live
on that island, much less fight there.

MACARTHUR

If you don't expect our men to hold up
there, then neither will the Japanese.

General MacArthur stabs the map with his corn cob pipe.

MACARTHUR

New Guinea is the gateway back to the
Philippines. We'll make our stand there.

KENNEY

Mac we're outnumbered two to one.
Buna's being reinforced with the 11th
Sentai and 582nd Kokutai...

MacArthur looks over to Ennis to confirm it. Ennis nods.

KENNEY

...while my kids are patching their
planes with tin-can lids.

General MacArthur puffs on his pipe, unfazed.

KENNEY

The command and logistic structure
needs a complete overhaul. It's the
damnedest mess I've ever seen!

MACARTHUR

Ennis will finish pruning the deadwood.

Ennis nods with a smile.

MACARTHUR

I'll make sure you get all the supplies
you need. Now, how's morale?

KENNEY

(sarcastic)
Almost as upbeat as mine.

MACARTHUR

Uh huh. Well, I plan to address that.

MacArthur opens a door to an adjoining room. He ushers
General Kenney in.

General Kenney looks like he has seen a ghost. But his state
of shock quickly subsides to a smile.

EXT. SCHWIMMER DROME, FLIGHT LINE - DAY

Dick plays a clarinet next to his P-38. The other pilots kill time playing poker. The game comes to an abrupt halt when General Kenney and Eddie Rickenbacker pull up in a Jeep. The pilots jump to their feet and salute the General.

KENNEY

Men, out of all fighter pilots just one tenth of one percent will ever make Ace...of those few, only one will be the Ace of Aces.

The pilots' sullen faces instantly transform. They flock around Eddie. Dick looks star-struck.

KENNEY

I'd like you to meet Captain Eddie Rickenbacker.

LYNCH

How many d'ya get Captain?

RICKENBACKER

Twenty six.

The pilots MURMUR -- awed by the tally.

LYNCH

Most of us don't have any.

KENNEY

And he shot them all down in only six months...earning our nation's highest award, the Congressional Medal of Honor.

RICKENBACKER

Well, keep in mind, back then the Germans were pretty thick at the front...always plenty of targets to shoot at.

DICK

The Japs are pretty thick over here too.

SNICKERS and OOOHS emanate as Dick throws down the gauntlet. General Kenney arches an eyebrow.

KENNEY

Tell you what, Eddie. I'll give a case of scotch to the first one who can break your record.

The pilots HOOT and HOLLER.

RICKENBACKER

A race of Aces, eh. Guess records are made to be broken. So, double it! Put me down for another case, General.

The fliers rejoice louder. A NEW FIRE GLEAMS in Dick's eyes.

EXT. SCHWIMMER DROME, FLIGHT LINE - DAY

Twelve P-38s crank up their engines. They bustle along the taxiway. Lynch leads in #10 -- marked by twin command stripes wrapped around each boom. Dick follows in #15.

Two by two, the P-38s ROAR down the dirt strip. Dust kicks up in their wake -- sandblasting the planes behind them.

The trees lining the runway give a heightened sense of speed. They lift off and are swallowed by the hazy, humid air.

EXT. OVER PORT MORESBY - DAY

The P-38s climb through the rain clouds. They burst through the top -- revealing a sea of white fleece and a cobalt blue sky. The sun beats down on Lynch as Dick pulls up alongside.

LYNCH
That's what I love about flying...
it's always sunny upstairs.

Dick looks around and soaks up the sun.

EXT. OVER THE OWEN STANLEY MOUNTAIN RANGE - DAY

Lynch leads the formation over the unforgiving Owen Stanley Mountains. The range stretches as far as the eye can see. The P-38s barely clear the jungle covered mountain tops. At 21,000 feet, their contrails crystallize in the cold air.

EXT. OVER THE SOLOMON SEA - DAY

A Japanese formation from the 582nd Kokutai cruises at 15,000 feet. The D3A Vals are slow, two seat dive bombers -- with large fixed wheel fairings. Escorting them are A6M Zeros. The round, radial engine fighters are fast and maneuverable.

Buna, New Guinea hangs on the horizon. The Vals and Zeros race towards their target.

EXT. BUNA, THE OLD STRIP - DAY

Troops from the 32nd "Red Arrow" Infantry Division and their Australian counterparts slug it out with JAPANESE SOLDIERS.

The allied forces make slow headway across a bridge.

Out of the smoke and debris, a mass of Japanese soldiers storm forward. They SCREAM in unison.

JAPANESE SOLDIERS
Tennoheika banzai!

A Nikaku suicide bomber streaks through the falling bodies. He triggers the detonator on his explosive belt.

The EXPLOSION destroys a tank, kills several Americans, and knocks the bridge out of commission. Undeterred, American troops wade forward through the swamp.

Out of the sun comes a swarm of Val dive bombers. Bombs BLAST all around the soldiers.

EXT. BATTLE OVER BUNA - DAY

Lynch spots the FIREBALLS up ahead.

LYNCH
Red Flight lead, looks like Vals and
Zeros...let's hit 'em hard and fast.

The P-38s peel off into a dive -- jettisoning their fuel tanks on the way down. They swing behind the Japanese.

Excited RADIO CHATTER fills the airwaves.

Dick slashes across a flock of Zeros and dive bombers. He FIRES wildly at a number of them -- completely missing.

DICK
Come on...come on.

Dick sees a Zero maneuvering onto Lynch's tail.

DICK
Tommy, you got one right behind you!

Lynch takes his eye off the Zero he's tracking to confirm the threat. Lynch jinks as Dick wings in.

Dick BLAZES away at the Zero and sets it smoking.

DICK
My closure's too high.

Lynch curves around and sees another Zero behind Dick.

LYNCH
Dick, Zeros on your six.

Dick sees the Zeros angling for a shot. He noses over into a steep dive. Dick floats up into his seat straps.

The Zeros ripple off a few SHOTS. But they can't match his rate of descent and pull away.

Dick fights shock waves forming on his wings -- a condition called compressibility. He tugs back on the controls. They refuse to respond. The P-38 buffets violently.

The airspeed indicator swings past the redline. The ground rushes closer and closer.

LYNCH

Dick, you're going too fast. Chop the throttles. Trim up and skid her.

Dick cuts the throttles, skids the plane with his rudders, and heaves back on the yoke.

The control surfaces start to respond as he plunges into the lower, denser air.

Rivets POP out of the wings.

Dick is crushed into his seat. Tunnel vision sets in under the massive G-forces. He levels off just above the trees.

Dick's tunnel vision dissipates. He sees a Val dead ahead. Dick jams the throttles and races in for the kill.

A 7.7mm tail gun tracks Dick's P-38. It FIRES as the two planes weave back and forth.

The Val bobs around in Dick's reticle. He SHOOTS several bursts from a slight angle. But the tracers arc short. Dick shakes his head and refocuses.

OVER THE OCEAN

The Val drops its bombs into the bay and pulls up. The EXPLOSION sends a massive GEYSER shooting into the sky.

Dick barely avoids being brought down by it. He slips underneath the Val's soft underbelly.

The tail gun swings around, searching for the P-38 below.

Dick pitches the nose straight up. The engine markings resemble a shark, shooting out of the depths.

Volley of TRACERS slice through the Val's tail. The whole tail section tumbles off. The P-38 zooms over its prey.

Dick rolls inverted -- watching the Val spiral down.

DICK

Wahoo...I got one...I got one.

LYNCH

Ya haven't won the war yet. Zero at 12.

A Zero zooms past Dick's P-38.

Dick drops a notch of flaps, retards a throttle, and jams the other forward. He snaps around onto the Zero's tail.

The Zero twists and turns around the sky.

Dick works the throttles and flaps like he's playing a piano.

He closes in and squeezes off a quick CANNON BURST -- only yards away. The Zero erupts in flames and rolls upside down.

DICK

That's two!

Lynch sees the flaming Zero slam into the water.

LYNCH

That oughta cool him off.

Dick laughs with a jitter.

Ki-43 Oscars of the 11th Sentai enter the melee. The ultra maneuverable Oscars are similar in shape to the Zeros. The Oscars are painted green with lightning bolts on the tail.

Two Oscars bounce Dick's P-38.

LYNCH

Pour on the coals Dick.

Lynch reverses course to cover Dick.

Dick is jolted by a loud BANG. White-hot TRACERS strike his left engine. Tracers zip over his canopy. He checks the rearview -- the Oscar's gun roots sparkle.

DICK

I'm hit...I'm hit...

Dick unloads his P-38 in a shallow dive. Stray bullets spray water up in front of him.

Lynch drops in behind the Oscars.

LYNCH

Hang in there, I'm on 'em.

Lynch cuts loose at the trail Oscar. The cone of CANNON FIRE shreds the plane to pieces.

The Oscar PLOWS into the palm trees along the coastline. Lynch yanks his P-38 up -- practically mowing the tree tops.

ON THE OLD STRIP

The Allied troops see Dick's P-38 ZOOM over the airstrip. The lead Oscar is right behind -- FIRING.

Smoke rises from the other Oscar smoldering on the beach. The troops hear the DISTINCTIVE WHISTLE of the Lightning.

Lynch blasts through the smoke and FIRES at the last Oscar. The Oscar EXPLODES. The troops CHEER -- waving their helmets and rifles. Lynch pulls up into a victory roll.

EXT. TENT, LALOKI JUNGLE - DAY

Dick braces himself against a tree. His hand quakes as he bends over -- vomiting violently.

Lynch searches around the tent for him.

LYNCH

Dick...Dick...

Dick wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.

LYNCH

The powdered milk still getting to ya?

DICK

I'll get used to it.

LYNCH

Hey, I'm still not used to it...don't think it's humanly possible.

They laugh.

LYNCH

The whole gang's down at the club,
wanna come celebrate your baptism?

Lynch turns and leaves. Dick lingers before following.

INT. SCHWIMMER DROME, 39TH OFFICERS CLUB - DAY

The pilots congratulate one another. Dick "talks with his hands" -- reliving the moments and maneuvers of the fight. Dick gestures to Lynch, who's calmly sipping a drink.

DICK

Lynch also bagged two.

Lynch smiles.

LYNCH

Couldn't let ya get 'em all.

General Kenney enters with Rickenbacker and Ennis in trail. He SLAMS the door shut. The pilots' celebration halts.

KENNEY

I've read your reports. You did just about everything wrong...opening fire out of range...and turning with the Zero. That thing'll outmaneuver you every time.

DICK

Not if you drop a notch of flaps and use asymmetric thrust, sir.

The other pilots look dumbfounded.

DICK
 ...you know, cut the power on the inside
 engine and throttle up on the outboard.
 She'll turn on a dime, sir.

The pilots look at each other. Lynch laughs bemusedly.
 Kenney shoots Lynch and Dick a stern look.

KENNEY
 From now on stick to her strengths,
 high speed slashes. You're lucky they
 haven't fought the Lightning before.
 But make no mistake they'll learn and
 adapt...however, you did manage to shoot
 down fifteen of theirs with no losses.

The pilots erupt in CHEERS and self-praise. The General
 motions for them to calm down.

KENNEY
 I'd like to announce the Thirty-Ninth's
 first Ace...Captain Tommy Lynch.

The pilots CLAP and CHEER. Rickenbacker erases "3" from the
 scoreboard and chalks in "5" by Lynch's name.

ENNIS
 Bet they don't even have any real
 drinks to celebrate with?

LYNCH
 Just the "Jungle Juice" sir.

Lynch hoists up his glass and smiles. Kenney scoffs at it.

KENNEY
 Not that fermented coconut stuff.

General Kenney smiles -- unveiling three bottles of scotch.

KENNEY
 There'll be alot more of this for
 whoever breaks Eddie's record.

The crews CHEER and distribute the liquor. Rickenbacker and
 the Generals notice Dick drinking a Coke.

ENNIS
 Aren't you having any Lieutenant?

DICK
 Uh, no thank you sir...I'm fine.

Ennis scowls, as if insulted.

KENNEY
 Sure you don't want a scotch and soda?
 You earned it.

DICK
That's alright sir, more for the others.

KENNEY
Cheers Lieutenant! Congratulations on
your two kills.

Rickenbacker notices Dick wince. They CLANG their drinks.

EXT. SKEET FIELD - DUSK

Kenney and Ennis shoot skeet with Rickenbacker.

ENNIS
Deploying the P-38 looks like it might
be the turning point. Pull!

A clay pigeon flies out. Ennis FIRES and disintegrates the
target. Kenney gestures to the setting sun and laughs.

KENNEY
Maybe the Rising Sun is setting.

ENNIS
Especially if Lynch keeps it up.

KENNEY
Watch out for Bong. I got the feeling
he has what it takes to break the --

ENNIS
He's still a "straight shooter"...
can't hit anything from an angle.

Kenney takes aim, FIRES, and misses the mark. Kenney lowers
his gun and glowers at Ennis for talking while he shoots.

KENNEY
I read your reports from Luke!

RICKENBACKER
It's a shame...

Rickenbacker loads a slug into his shotgun.

RICKENBACKER
...seems like a nice kid.

Another clay pigeon takes flight. Rickenbacker FIRES and it
instantly shatters.

RICKENBACKER
Someday he's going to realize he's
not shooting at clay pigeons.

EXT. NEAR HORANDA STRIP, DOBODURA - DAY

A long line of injured troops make their way down a jungle trail. The American soldiers hear P-38s ROARING over them.

EXT. HORANDA STRIP, FLIGHT LINE - DAY

Dick slides down the wing of a new P-38G -- from the 9th Fighter Squadron. It's a similar olive drab scheme but minus the shark mouths. The propeller spinners are bright red.

Lynch greets Dick on the ground. He checks out Dick's new "Flying Knights" patch. It's a winged knight's helmet superimposed on a bar-sinister shield.

DICK
Finally got our own ships.

LYNCH
After ya wore the wings off ours.

Lynch gestures to his P-38s at the other end of the tarmac. He feigns envy and annoyance.

LYNCH
Hey, these aren't the only new birds
out here. Come on, ya gotta see this.

EXT. BUNA, THE OLD STRIP - DAY

Soldiers and Army vehicles mill about the Old Strip. Lynch and Dick inspect a Zero left behind by the Tainan Kokutai. They hop onto the wing and check out the cockpit.

LYNCH
It's going to Eagle Farm for evaluation.
Feels odd getting so close to one, huh?

Dick eases into the cockpit -- like it's forbidden territory. He plays around with the controls.

DICK
Wonder what it's like to fly?

Dick sees a picture of a JAPANESE GIRL affixed to the dash. He peels off the photo and studies it.

LYNCH
Do ya have anyone back home?

Dick slowly tapes the photo back on the dash.

DICK
Uh, I'm not sure...

LYNCH
What d'ya mean?

DICK
Aw, guess she didn't want me flying.

LYNCH
Yeah, flying and relationships don't
always go hand and hand, so to speak.

Dick chuckles but grows serious.

DICK
I saw how hard my pa struggled with
the Depression, figured I oughta settle
my career before settling down.

LYNCH
So how long have ya known her?

DICK
We've been friends ever since I can
remember...

Dick looks back at the photo of the Japanese girl.

DICK
...but how do you know if she's the one?

LYNCH
Hey, if she really loves ya, she'll
be waiting when you get back. If not
...it probably wasn't in the cards.

DICK
How about you? Anyone?

Lynch puffs up with pride as he pulls out a picture.

LYNCH
That's my fiancée, Rosemary.

Dick WHISTLES.

DICK
Wow, she sure is cute.

Lynch laughs.

LYNCH
Don't go getting any ideas.

EXT. HORANDA STRIP, FLIGHT LINE - DAY

Dick works on his P-38 with a mechanic. Jerry Johnson and
another pilot, TOMMY MCGUIRE, approach.

JERRY
Dick. How the hell are you?