# CAN COMBATAIR WILLIAM OF THE AMERICAN

## HALL OF FAME

### Colonel James B. Morehead, USAF

James Morehead ended World War II as an Ace, with eight aerial victories scored in the Pacific and European Theatres of operations, one of only a handful of Aces to score in both theatres. His decorations include the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star and the Distinguished Flying Cross.

#### **Early Flight Training**

Officially joining the service in August of 1940, Morehead was accepted into the Army Air Corps Cadet Program where he qualified in both the Curtiss P-36 and the Curtiss P-40 Warhawk.

In December of 1941,
Morehead and 54 other P-40
pilots were sent to Manila to
defend the Philippines. En
route, their destination was
changed to Australia, where
the P-40s were assembled and
test flown. The pilots, some of
whom had only a few hours in
the aircraft, were inexperienced
with the Curtiss fighter.

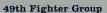


forehead stands beside his P-40 at RAAF Bachelor Field in

17th Provisional
Squadron
In early February
1942, Morehead
arrived at the airfield
on Java, where he
joined the 17th
Provisional Pursuit
Squadron. The
squadron consisted of
a few pilots who
served in the
Philippines and the
new replacements

from Australia.

The inexperienced airmen quickly found themselves facing an experienced, aggressive foe. In one of the few early successes for the green American pilots, Morehead downed two Japanese Betty bombers over Malang, for which he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. By March 1942, the 17th Provisional Pursuit Squadron had been decimated, suffering 50-75% losses on most missions. Morehead and the few remaining pilots were evacuated to Australia on the last B-17 to escape from Java.



Five of the pilots of the 17th joined the 49th Fighter Group in the Pacific. Morehead was assigned to the 8th Fighter Squadron and began instructing the pilots, many of whom had no experience with P-40s.

Although losses continued to be heavy, the 49th Fighter Group began to gain momentum against the Japanese. On April 25, 1942, Morehead, leading four P-40s, engaged approximately 31 Japanese bombers and more than 50 fighters approximately eighty miles north of Darwin,



nel James Morehead leans out from the cockpit of his Curtiss P-40 Warhawk.

Australia. In a swirling dogfight, three Mitsubishi Betty bombers fell to Morehead's guns, while his squadron mates accounted for eight more. The victory helped to boost American morale.

From March to August 1942, Morehead shot down five Japanese bombers and two Zero fighters before he was withdrawn from combat.

#### Mediterranean Theater

Assigned to the 71st Fighter Squadron, Morehead began flying P-38s from bases in Italy. He flew escort and ground attack missions, including several against a heavily defended oil complex at Ploesti, Romania. On June 6, 1944, he shot down an ME-109, his eighth victory.

#### After the War

With the end of the war,
Morehead left the Air Force
only to rejoin in 1947. He flew
in the Korean Conflict, served
as an Air Force liaison and
instructor with the Nationalist
Chinese on Taiwan. Concluding
his military service with a
tour of duty at the Pentagon,
Morehead retired from the Air
Force in 1967.