



# **Soviet Lend-Lease Fighter Aces of World War 2 (Aircraft of the Aces)**

*George Mellinger*

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By the end of 1941 the Soviet Union was near collapse and its air force almost annihilated, leaving large numbers of surviving pilots with no aircraft to fly. At this juncture the United Kingdom put aside its prewar animosities toward the Communists and despatched several hundred Hurricane fighters despite the fact that at this time the British were still struggling to supply the RAF with modern fighters in North Africa and the Far East. A total of 4300 Hurricanes and Spitfires, as well as several hundred Tomahawks, Kittyhawks and Airacobras, obtained from the USA under Lend-lease, were eventually supplied to the USSR in an attempt to prevent a Russian defeat. After the United States had entered the war, the Americans extended Lend-lease to include direct supply to the Soviets as well as the British, and among the aircraft sent were almost 10,000 fighters - mainly P-39s, P-40s and P-63s. Although many of these aircraft were outdated when they arrived, and some were not particularly suited to Russian operating conditions, they served when they were needed. A number of Russian pilots became Heroes of the Soviet Union flying Lend-lease aircraft, and many more gained their early experience before converting to their own Yaks and Lavochkins. All of these types, including the Hurricane, remained in active units until the end of the war, and even into the post-war period.

The Soviet government tried to play down or conceal the importance of Lend-lease fighters until well into the 1980s, and the pilots who flew them were discriminated against as 'foreigners'. Only in recent years have these pilots felt free to admit what they flew, and now the fascinating story of these men and their heroic achievements can emerge.

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