

Paul Smith was born in Sugar Grove, WV, in 1921, the first son of Arlie and Mary Smith. He had two brothers David (deceased) [and] Eddie of Staunton, VA, two sisters Mary Smith Byrd of Martinsburg, WV, and Madeline Smith Shanholtz (deceased). He reportedly (by eye witness accounts) was said to be very strong and at the age of 18 years he went into Roy Bowers' store in Sugar Grove and grabbed a 100 lb. bag of salt in each hand and one in his teeth and stood up with them. He was interested in boxing and at the time there was a Dr. Huffman in the area that was a trained boxer and offered to give him lessons. They went into the "Pool Room" in Sugar Grove and put gloves on. Paul bloodied the Doctor's nose and gave him a black eye. The Dr. told Paul that he should be teaching boxing lessons. He didn't mind taking chances and would frequently climb to the top of the old iron bridge below Sugar Grove and walk the top rail from one side to the other. He joined the military aspiring to become a fighter pilot. He was aboard a ship sailing from California to Hawaii where he was awarded the Golden Gloves for being undefeated in in all the boxing completion onboard. Paul was stationed at Pearl Harbor when it was attacked by the Japanese but was unharmed. He was then stationed with the 431st Fighter Squadron in the South Pacific known as "Hades Fighter Squadron". He was assigned a P38 Lightning which was the fastest plane at the time capable of reaching a speed of 420 mph. It was equipped with four 50 caliber machine guns and a 20 mm cannon capable of firing 409 rounds per minute. The Japanese called the P38 "The Forked Tail Devil". Most of the P38 pilots named their plane and painted that name on their plane. Paul had a picture of a red devil attacking with a three-pronged pitchfork painted on his plane and named it "Satan". His plane was shot up badly after being attacked by two Tonies and three Zeroes but he managed to get back to Goodenough Island where he crash landed. According to a journal he

kept, his left engine had been shot out and the plane riddled with bullet holes and about a gallon of fuel left in his tank. He had several cuts on his head and face. After being treated for his injuries and rested he was awarded a Purple Heart and issued another P38 which he named "Satan II". Soon after that the 475th Fighter Group also named "Satan's Angels" was formed consisting of hand-picked pilots which Paul was one of. After three months of extensive training in August 1943 the 475th boarded a Liberty Ship and sailed to New Guinea and then were transported to Port Moresby by C-47 aircraft. The 475th quickly became the fastest scoring Fighter Group and was dubbed by the enemy as "The Bloody Butchers of Rabaul". One of the missions he was on was over "Merulina" they were attacked by 25 Oscars, Zekes and Kates. After a 20-minute fight from 12,000 to 20,000 feet 13 P38s shot down 11 of the enemy planes with no P38s lost. In another attack by the Japs on "Tsili Tsili" which was for a while a secret airfield the P38s got off the ground and shot down 12 enemy planes. On another mission he and other P38 pilots escorted B24 bombers to bomb "Rapopo Airfield". The P38s shot down 20 enemy planes but lost 2 B24 Bombers. Another mission he and other P38 pilots escorted B25 Bombers to hit "Aeewac" this raid resulted in the P38s shooting down 11 enemy planes and the bombers destroyed 200 enemy planes on the ground and the enemy kill on the ground was counted at 1500 and the base completely destroyed with no loss of American personal. On 9/8/1943 he and four other P38s were scrambled to "Merulina" for support and he and two others made it back to base safely, the other two were lost. Another mission he and other P38 pilots escorted 36 B24 Bombers over "Newark" where 144 tons of bombs were dropped and left two enemy cargo ships burning in the harbor and no American loss. Another mission over "Newark" the P38s were escorting B24 Bombers and after a short battle with a "Tony" when Paul landed his plane he found a

bullet hole in his right coolant radiator and the same bullet had bent one prop blade that had to be replaced. 10/09/1943 at 4:00 am the Jap bombers hit the area of his base and killed 7 personal and wounded 22, and also took out a fuel dump. 10/12/1943 the P38s escorted B24s and B25 Bombers on a raid on "Rabaul" hitting 12 enemy ships in the harbor and destroying 100 enemy planes but lost two P38s and one B25 and one B24.

On November 7th 1943 Paul took off from North Embi Airfield (Dobodura No. 12) escorting B-24S to bomb "Garove" and hit "Kaimana" returning via "Kiriwina Island"

His P38 was last seen on Sunday Nov. 7th at 11:00 am entering heavy clouds about 20 miles northwest of the "Ayutosen Maru" (The Gona Wreck). When he failed to return to base, he was officially declared MIA. Another P38 went down on that mission and the pilot was rescued. Later Paul was declared KIA and is memorialized on the tablets of the missing at Manila American Cemetery in the Philippines.

He was also awarded the Air Medal with Silver Oak Leaf Cluster. He became an "Ace Pilot" and climbed to the rank of 1st Lt and a "Flight Leader" during his service.

written by Tom Shanholtz

[edited for website by James "Jamie" Arthur Johnson]