

Ace to Ace



Maj. Richard Bong (left) and Maj. Thomas McGuire Jr., shown together in the Philippines, were the top two US aces of World War II. Bong shot down at least 40 enemy aircraft. McGuire scored at least 38 victories. No US fighter pilot before or since has come close to matching those numbers. Friends and friendly rivals, each received the Medal of Honor for heroism in the Pacific. When this photo was taken, on Nov. 15, 1944, the two were at the top of their games. Within months, however, both would be dead. McGuire went first; he died in combat on Jan. 7, 1945. Bong survived his tour and became a Lockheed test pilot. He died in a P-80 crash on Aug. 6, 1945. His death was big news, sharing the next day's front pages with the bombing of Hiroshima.



McGuire strikes a jaunty pose.



Bong with his wife, Marge.