Neither is it true that the Japanese thought the Lightning particularly dangerous, and neither did they give it any nickname as often claimed. In fact, the diaries of several JAAF Wewak Ki-43 pilots record a preference for tackling the type at lower altitudes, where its clumsiness in a low energy state made it easy prey for a pilot with good manoeuvrability. To IJN pilots the Lightning was yet another adversary they preferred to engage at lower altitudes and on their terms. This, of course, was not always possible. Whilst true that the Lightning possessed higher speed compared to its Japanese opponents, some historians questionably claim this bestowed the type as overall "markedly superior" to its adversaries.

It is also true that the range of the P-38 was better than the single-engine fighters available in the Pacific throughout 1942/43, making it possible to engage the enemy over distant locations such as Rabaul. Largely for this reason, Fifth and Thirteenth Air Force commanders kept pressing Washington for more Lightnings. The commanders were supported by their pilots who considered it the fighter of choice.

However, we need to examine how and why the Lightning performed so poorly in the Pacific. Every new type has its teething problems, but the ones faced by the Lightning were second only to the Corsair, technologically even more advanced. The Lightning, a huge airframe, was delivered to a backward theatre but the airframe itself portended advanced technology. This contradiction quickly established time-consuming setbacks, substantially delaying its introduction to combat. The most glaring hindrance was leaking fuel tanks, to which field repairs proved especially time-consuming, and delayed the type's introduction to combat. The problem was rectified in later models, but the leaks were persistent in both the P-38F and P-38G models. Compared to single-engine fighters, the enormous airframe demanded about four times the man-hours to keep them airworthy. Aside from an extra engine to maintain, advanced ancillary systems such as control servo boosters required nuanced technical skills. Supercharger coolers ran hot, requiring pipes to be extended in the field to avoid splitting. Machine-gun recoil frayed gun-mount bearings and the guns eventually required steel tie-downs. Heavy rain played havoc with the electrical systems including shorting out solenoids and electrical plugs. Wing-mounted drop-tanks damaged the flaps when released in combat, a problem solved by adding fins to the tanks.

The most questionable claim is that its twin engines offered an additional safety factor, so essential for the lengthy stretches of ocean and jungle unique to the Pacific. However, once again the contention is not substantiated in operational records, and in fact they suggest the reverse. The type's contra-rotating V-1710 Allison in-line engines were glycol-cooled, thus more susceptible to combat damage than robust radials such as those which powered the P-47D. Two engines meant almost twice the chance of having an engine hit in combat. Losing an engine was usually lethal on take-off. Asymmetric thrust was a challenge to handle even in cruise, but particularly so in instrument conditions or tough weather. A single-engine Lightning was a sitting duck for Japanese fighters. There are numerous times when Lightnings were written off back at base when trying to land with one engine operative. An asymmetric low-level approach with flaps down on one engine was always an unwanted proposition. Many pilots did not live to talk about it.