



# Like Father, LIKE SON

Confessions of a second-generation fighter pilot

BY CLINTON D. BURDICK, CAPTAIN USAAC (RET.) AS TOLD TO AND WRITTEN BY JAMES P. BUSHA

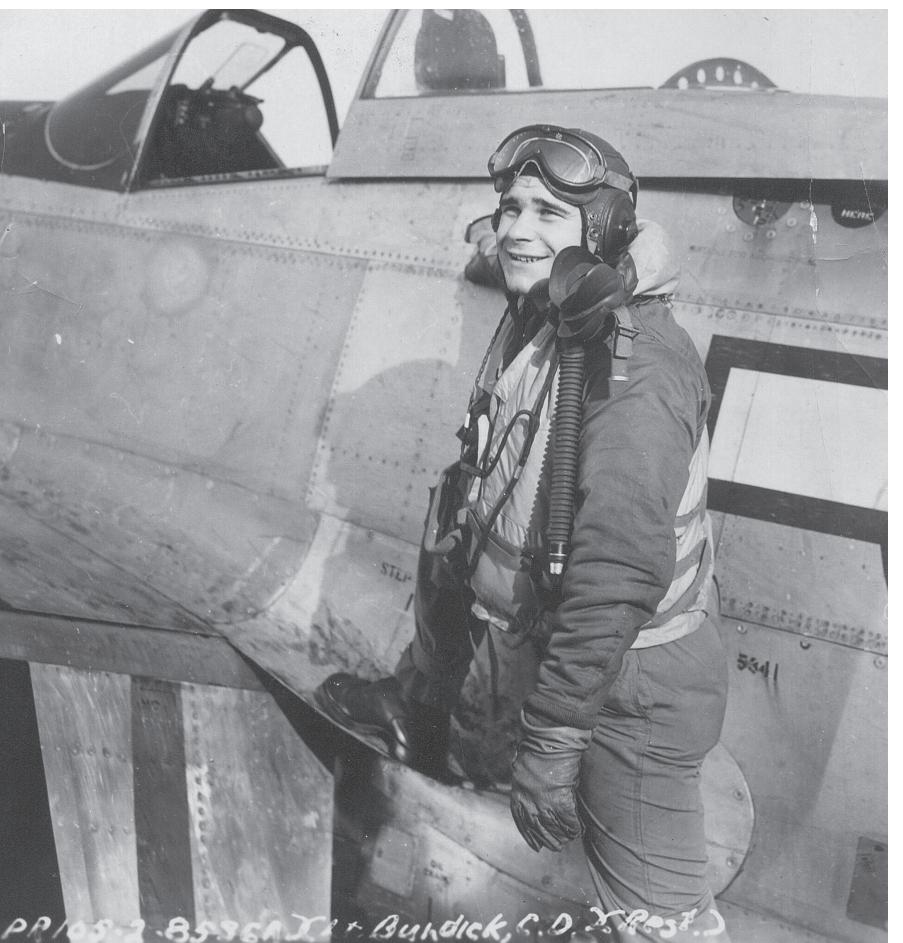
**There were two things that got me interested in aviation** while I was a kid growing up in the 1930s, model airplanes and my father Howard. My dad, of course, was the bigger influence, not because of his job in the banking business, but what he accomplished years before I was even born. Although he rarely spoke of his exploits, my father flew Sopwith Camels with the 17th Aero Squadron during the "War to end all wars"—WW I. After the war ended he closed that chapter of his life and walked away from flying. He believed he was simply a young man doing his job for his country, did what the military had asked him to do, got out of the service, met my mother and started a family. The trouble was there was one historic issue he couldn't change or hide; from mid-September of 1918 through late October, my father had shot down eight enemy airplanes and achieved ace status under the command of the Royal Air Force.

He kept his aerial combat memories hidden from most of us and it wasn't until WW II was just beginning to rear its ugly head when he gave me some "fatherly advice." He said, "Clinton, now that you reached the age known as 'draft bait,' you really need to think about volunteering. They have an obligation to make available your choice of service if you're qualified. My advice for you is to join the Air Corps and become a pilot, before you end up in the infantry slinging a rifle and slogging through mud up to your knees." I listened to his words of wisdom and before long, I was earning my wings and wound up in fighters.

The 356th F.G.'s colorful diamond paint scheme could be identified from a long distance. This Mustang is flown by Hess Bombers who flew an identically painted aircraft in the 356th in WW II. (Photo courtesy of Budd Davison)

### Tricks of the trade

By the time I turned 19 years old, Uncle Sam thought I was ready to fly a fighter—personally, I think I needed a little more practice. I started out in the P-40 Warhawk and during my first flight I thought, "Oh, dear, this small airplane has way too much power!" The P-40 had twice that of the AT-6 that I had been used to, but it was also much more maneuverable. It had very good control responses; heck, all the fighters did. When you pull back on the stick, you go like hell straight up. But when you push the nose over, you go downhill even faster! Make no mistake; flying a fighter was a very physically demanding experience, especially with the amount of Gs we pulled during evasive maneuvers. All in all the P-40 was a good airplane,



but it was getting tired, short on range and ran out of breath above 20,000 feet. The Thunderbolt, on the other hand, was a whole 'nother animal.

I was sent to the East Coast where I became acquainted with my new front office. The P-47 was a behemoth; there was almost enough room inside the cockpit to rent out the other half! Our training focused on gunnery and formation work along with low-level navigation, which would really come in handy later on in Europe. We had heard stories about the ruggedness of the Jug and unfortunately, I proved that point during one of

my training flights.

We were sent out to a point a considerable distance away from our base and told to drop to the deck and find our way back home. I came zooming across a big cornfield and must have been daydreaming because I failed to notice the line of big high trees in front of me. I was a little late pulling back on the stick and took a full six feet off the tops of the trees. When I landed, the entire belly was covered in the remains of the trees I killed. My crew chief came out, scratched his head and said, "Don't worry about it, Lieutenant, I'll get it cleaned up before the CO sees it." That crew chief was like all the others I had—a bunch of great guys!

Deemed combat ready, I was sent to England and became a replacement pilot with the 361st Fighter Squadron, 356th Fighter Group. Our main job was to protect the bombers. One way to do that was to shoot down the enemy fighters that showed up when the bomber stream was over Europe. Finding the Luftwaffe was not hard; shooting them down was the hard part! As a new wingman, it was my job to act as if my head was on a swivel and protect my leader from enemy fighters. In combat I soon found that the enemy appears very quickly, and disappears even quicker! The P-47 was a great gun platform, not only in the aerial sense, but also for use against ground targets, which we frequently went after, after our release from the bombers. I fell in love with the Jug and felt a sense of betrayal when we had to trade them in.

### Mustang follies

When our group switched over to the P-51 Mustang in mid-November of 1944, most of us thought we had just lost our best friend. When I first laid eyes on the Mustang all I could think was, this airplane is too small for a human being to fly, let alone fight with! The P-47 had acres of metal all round it had carried two more guns than the Mustang did. The cockpit of the Jug was comfortable and roomy, compared to the tight confines of the Mustang. With all our gear including a parachute attached, we had to wiggle our way into the cockpit and practically had to use a shoe-horn to get inside.

Another big concern I had was the fact that the P-47 had big radial engine out ahead of it and could punch through a brick wall and keep on ticking. The Mustang, although faster than the Jug, had a liquid-cooled engine and had little to no tolerance for damage. One little nick and odds were your mission would be a one-way trip. But once I got some time in the Mustang, I began to develop a great relationship with it and found out quickly what a truly harmonized fighter it was. The Mustang was definitely a much better air-to-air fighter as our group began to prove its worth against the Luftwaffe.

I had named my Mustang *DoDo*, after my fiancée back home. Unfortunately, her father was



### Personal combat report of Lt. Clinton Burdick, 361st Fighter Squadron, 356th Fighter Group

I was flying Chinwag White 3 southwest of Dummer Lake on a bomber withdrawal, escorting B-24s that had just hit their target near Brunswick. We were at 27,000 feet on the way out when Nuthouse (our radar controller) called bandits in the area. Our group spotted 15 to 20 Fw 190s in a left Lufberry below us at between 10,000 and 14,000 feet. Because White 2 had to abort with engine problems, White 4 escorted him back to France and I ended up flying wing to White Leader, Lt. Ashby. White Leader singled out one Fw 190 and went in to attack. I observed White Leader getting many hits on the left side of the 190 and saw the pilot bail out. His chute did not open and I saw both pilot and plane hit the ground. White

P-51K s/n 44-11564 flown by Captain Bearley of the 359th Fighter Squadron is prepared for a escort mission over Germany during 1945. (Photo courtesy of Jack Cook)



### Tale of Two Survivors

It's rare when we have a WW II veteran flying a WW II airplane. In the case of the opening photo, however, the photo session soared into the atmosphere in terms of rarity: the pilot of *Vergeltungswaffe* was Hess Bomberger, who not only flew in WW II, but also flew Mustangs in the 356th Fighter Group along with second-generation ace Clinton Burdick. And his WW II mount was indeed, *Vergeltungswaffe*. The photo was shot in 1981, so 36 years after the fact, Hess was still riding Mustangs.



Photo courtesy of Jack Cook

P-51K s/n 44-11336 OC+A "Connecticut Yankee" was flown by Capt. Jack Brown who downed a Me 109 with her on April 7, 1945. (Photo courtesy of Jack Cook)



## Howard Burdick: THE ACE FATHER OF AN ACE

**A**merica's only ace whose son became an ace was born in Brooklyn in December 1891. Howard Burdick's father, Clinton the first, was chairman of a trust company, and his son had an adventurous streak. Upon receiving his wings, Howard joined the 17th Aero Squadron, one of two American units flying Sopwith Camels under RAF control in 1918. The 26-year-old New Yorker was uncommonly old for a Great War combat pilot but flourished under the tutelage of his flight commander, 21-year-old Lt. George Vaughan.

Unlike most U.S. Air Service pilots, all of Burdick's victories were assessed as destroyed. He scored his first success on September 18 when he downed an LVG observation plane near Rumilly, France, and at month's end he had four planes to his credit. Burdick became an ace the next month, sharing three victories with Vaughan and another pilot. Burdick's last success came on October 25 when he tangled with five Fokker D.VIIs, destroying one. He received the Distinguished Service Cross and Distinguished Flying Cross, becoming the 17th's leading ace. He was discharged in 1919.

Clinton Burdick, his son, was born in 1924, but his parents divorced in 1959. Father and son reconciled in California where Howard died in January 1975, age 83. —Barrett Tillman



Photo courtesy of Norman Franks

### Howard Burdick's Victories in WW I

Date	Aircraft flown	Enemy type shot down
September 18, 1918	Sopwith Camel	LVG C
September 24	Sopwith Camel	Fokker D.VII
September 28	Sopwith Camel	LVG C
September 28	Sopwith Camel	Fokker D.VII
October 2	Sopwith Camel	DFW C
October 14	Sopwith Camel	Halberstadt C
October 14	Sopwith Camel	Fokker D.VII
October 25	Sopwith Camel	Fokker D.VII

#### Distinguished Service Cross (DSC)

The Distinguished Service Cross is presented to Howard Burdick, Second Lieutenant (Air Service), U.S. Army, for extraordinary heroism in action northwest of Cambrai, France, September 28, 1918. Attacked by two Fokker biplanes, Lieutenant Burdick outmaneuvered both machines, shot one into flames and routed the other one. Later, seeing three Fokkers attacking an American aviator, he at once dove into the combat to his assistance, shooting down one and driving off the other two. His quick and unhesitating attack, single-handed, on the three Fokkers save the life of his fellow pilot.

General Orders No. 38, W.D., 1921

#### Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC)

"For skill and gallantry. On 25 October, while on an offensive patrol, this officer attacked a formation of five Fokker biplanes over the forest of Mormal and succeeded in shooting down one in flames. On another occasion he dived on an enemy two-seater but was in turn attacked by two Fokkers, one of which he succeeded in shooting down in flames. Later he attacked three enemy aircraft who were attacking one of our machines and shot down one which dived straight into the ground and crashed. This officer has now destroyed five EA (three in flames) and has at all times displayed the greatest gallantry, skill and disregard of danger." DFC citation

Leader then flew on my wing as I took after another Fw 190. At an altitude of 1,000 feet, I fired a short burst from about 300 yards with a 30-degree deflection and scored many strikes on the fuselage and cockpit area. After hitting this 190, the pilot jettisoned his canopy and bailed out, at about 300 feet. He was so low that his chute never opened. I claim one Fw 190 destroyed.

I then made a right turn to protect the tail of White Leader who was firing at a Fw 190 that had attempted a head on pass at me. I saw White Leader get many strikes on the 190. The 190 rolled over, split-s'd from 3,000 feet and went straight into the ground. I then was able to position myself on the tail of another Fw 190 and stayed at range less 100 feet for about one minute. Firing with zero deflection, I scored hits several times, although I had only one gun firing. After hitting the 190 several times, he broke away. I claim one Fw 190 damaged.

I saw another Fw 190 chasing a P-51 and I

made a pass on the 190. I opened fire head on, at a range of 500 yards and closed to about 100 yards. I observed some strikes on the 190. When I pulled up the 190 followed, firing at me. Thankfully, he could not draw any deflection and did not hit me. I claim one Fw 190 damaged.

My combat with these last two Fw 190s was at 3,000 feet and I knew I had to get some altitude and a wingman under my wings. I sighted White Leader flying above me to the right, still giving me protection, so I started after another 190 that was on the deck. I closed to a very close range, about 100 feet, and fired a short burst with only the one gun still firing with about 20 degrees deflection. The Fw 190 did a half snap to the right and went straight into the ground from about 20 feet, I claim one Fw 190 destroyed. (Confirmed by Lampshade Leader, see personal combat report of Major Donald J. Strait) Then I made a steep right climbing turn and rejoined my flight leader, Lt. Ashby.

We went to bounce another 190 stooging alone in the area when Chinwag Purple 2, Lt. Baskin, came out of nowhere and got between and in front of us and began to fire at the 190. I observed him getting many hits on the 190's left wing. He overshot the 190 and the 190 in turn went after him. White Leader fired a short burst getting hits on the engine and cockpit area. The 190 climbed to the left and then lowered his flaps to make an emergency landing. I came in next and gave him a short burst, observing hits but make no claim on this 190. The 190 tried to belly land in a field but overshot, hit a fence, cartwheeled, lost his left wing and broke into many pieces. I confirm the joint destruction of this Fw 190 by Lts. Ashby and Baskin. We remained on the deck because of intense flak and being low on gas, we headed

back to base. I fired a total of 882 rounds and was thankful I had others looking out for me, including the Squadron Leader, Major Strait.

### Personal combat report of Major Donald J. Strait, 361st Fighter Squadron, 356th Fighter Group

I was Lampshade Leader on the mission of 14 January 1945. While escorting the lead box of B-24s on withdrawal, Nuthouse called and said there were bandits in the Dummer Lake area. I was then a little southwest of Hanover so I called Chinwag Squadron to boost power and we arrived over the big lake a few minutes later. Unable to pick up anything, I started an orbit to the left. Chinwag Green Leader called and said there were 15 to 20 bogies in a large Lufberry about 10,000 feet below us. I called him to investigate as I was unable to see them. Just as he started down, I picked them up and immediately led the rest of the squadron down. Drawing into range, I

### Clinton Burdick's Victories in WW II

Date	Enemy type shot down
November 25, 1944	Fw 190 destroyed (ground)
December 5	Fw 190 destroyed; Fw 190 damaged
January 14, 1945	Two Fw 190s destroyed; Two Fw 190s damaged
February 20, 1945	Two Fi 156 (Me 108) destroyed* 0.5 Fi 156 (Me 108) destroyed*

\* Sources disagree on types

#### January 14, Post Mission Statement

"I wish to congratulate all echelons and units of the 8th Air Force on the results of today's mission. The bombing was good to excellent on the enemies top priority targets and our fighters topped all previous records with a score of 157 enemy aircraft destroyed. This will be recorded in the annals of the 8th Air Force as a record day and was only made possible through the combined cooperative efforts of all air and ground personnel composing our Bomber/Fighter team directed toward the destruction of the German machine." --General Jimmy Doolittle



P-51K s/n 44-11564 OC+W of the 359th Fighter Squadron in its revetment at Martlesham Heath, England, shortly after V-E Day. (Photo courtesy of Jack Cook)



**Above:** Major Don Strait, 13.5 kill ace and CO of the 361st Fighter Squadron, stands by his P-51D s/n 44015152 QI-T Jersey Jerk at Martlesham Heath, England, during 1945. (Photo courtesy of Jack Cook)

**Inset:** Jackie was the mount of Lt. John W. "Wild Bill" Crump of the 360th FS. PI-W's fuselage also sported a caricature of Crump's pet coyote Jeep. (Photo courtesy of Stan Piet)

called them out as Fw 190s and started a bounce singling out a lone 190 flying on the outside of the Lufberry.

As I closed into a good shooting range I fired a small burst observing no hits. The 190 still was in a left hand turn when I opened fire again, this time getting many hits on the fuselage and cockpit. Still closing, I fired another good burst observing many hits along the left side of the fuselage and in

the cockpit. The 190 did a violent snap and went into a dive. I pulled up off to the right and followed him down, observing the pilot bail out at around 3,000 feet as the plane went straight into the ground. I switched my gun selector over to camera only and took a short picture of the opened chute. Pulling out on the deck, I started a slow climbing orbit to the right.

Pulling out on the deck, I observed a P-51 chasing a 190. Turning to give him cover if he needed it, the 190 did a sudden snap, dove into the ground and exploded. I pulled alongside this P-51 and identified it as Chinwag White 3-Lt. Burdick. The fight was just about over so I climbed back up in the combat area and called the Chinwag Squadron to reform and set course for base.

### Like father, like son

Although my father and I had both survived the horrors of aerial combat, our training and combat experience were quite different in those 25 years that separated our involvement. I had well over 250 hours of training alone, in a wide variety of aircraft before I entered the combat arena.

**ALTHOUGH THE AIRPLANES HE FLEW WERE A LOT SLOWER, THEY WERE IN SOME ASPECTS MORE STABLE AND EASIER TO FLY THAN THE COMPLEX AIRPLANES I PILOTED.**

My father, on the other hand, had less than 50 hours total time before he was sent to the front lines. He had trained in fabric-covered biplanes, whose engines were hit and miss—mainly miss. Although the airplanes he flew were a lot slower, they were in some aspects more stable and easier to fly than the complex airplanes I piloted.

I typically flew on missions lasting seven hours or more and flew from our base in England to the heartland of Germany and back. Our living quarters on our base at Martlesham Heath, England, were heated brick buildings, and we ate at officer mess hall and relaxed in our group's officer's club. My father routinely flew less than two hours on his missions, due in part to the limited range because the small amount of fuel he carried. That's why his squadron was posted near the front lines, and every time the line moved—frontwards or backwards—so did he and his airfield. He slept in a tent and probably rarely enjoyed a hot meal, let alone a hot shower.

Our aerial combat tactics were quite different as well. We had been trained to fly in a "finger four" formation with two elements of two. One was the leader whose main task was to attack the enemy and the other was the wingman whose main job was to protect the leader—period. During WW I, my father would fly in a semi-loose formation but they really didn't abide to the theory of "shooter/protection". When they spotted the enemy, it was kind of like everybody for themselves as each side tried to outmaneuver the other. After all, that's how the term "dogfight" originated—everyone doing their own thing at close range.

I ended the war with 5.5 victories, and like my father, walked away from flying, got married and had a family. I too was just doing my part for my country to help secure our nation's freedoms. †