

Cyclone's FLYING CIRCUS

by John C. Holder

My father, Col Glen C. Holder, USAF (Ret), a Daedalian member (Stinsons) and I thought that we would take this opportunity to present his personal story and that of the 35th fighter squadron during World War II. My dad and I have read and enjoyed the many wartime experiences covered in articles in the *Daedalus Flyer* over the years and because of these I have been motivated to tell his story. These articles have been the catalyst for many pleasurable and informative conversations with my father regarding his experiences in the southwest Pacific during WWII and his 32 years in the military, and are some of my most treasured memories. First, an overview of the 35th Fighter Squadron's history would be helpful.



Officers of the 35th Fighter Squadron, October 1943. (l-r) By sign: Albert Brunelli, Norman Reid, Walter Posvistak and Roy Klandrud. Back row: Bob Crow, Fred Boerman, Mike McCoy, Luke Rainville, and Paul Kiser. Middle row: Addison "Doc" Tatum, Jim Brewer, Art Sullivan, Harold McClland, Emmett "Cyclone" Davis, Dick Suave, Charles Kneen, Glen "Gabby" Holder, Lee "Scaley" Everhart, Elliot Blandon and Dean Jacobson. Front row: Bill Dwyer, Jack Brown, Joe Watson, Carl Weaver, Harold "Hal" Souther, Bob Colgrove, Jimmy Owens and Charles Hill.

The 35th Fighter Squadron was activated as the 35th Aero Squadron on 12 June 1917 at Camp Kelly, San Antonio, Texas, and is one of the oldest U.S. military flying units. During World War I the unit was stationed in France and served as a flying training squadron.

On 1 April 1931 the 8th Pursuit Group was formed at Langley Field, Virginia and the 35th Pursuit Squadron was assigned along with the 33rd and the 36th Pursuit Squadrons. The 8th Pursuit Group was the third Pursuit Group formed by the USAAC and was primarily a training unit.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor 7 December 1941, the 35th Fighter Squadron, then stationed at Mitchell Field, New York, was assigned patrol duties along the Eastern seaboard to protect against feared German attacks.

Then, on 26 January 1942, the 35th Pursuit Squadron, as part of the 8th Pursuit Group, moved by train to Fort McDowell, San Francisco, California. On 12 February 1942 the 8th Pursuit Group passed under the "Golden Gate Bridge" on board the transport ship "Maui" bound for Australia and the war zone.

On 5 March 1942, the 8th Pursuit Group dropped anchor off of Brisbane, Australia after a 21-day voyage across the Pacific. The next day Group Headquarters was established and the unit began its preparation for combat. From Brisbane, flights began to stage up to Townsville on 26 April 1942 prior to the hop over to New Guinea and the combat front.

Then, on 28 April 1942, the 35th and 36th Fighter Squadrons were present at 7-mile airdrome, Port Moresby, New Guinea, the first U.S. fighter units in the New Guinea Theater of operations. On 30 April 1942, the maiden fighter strike for the U.S. was led by Lt Col Boyd "Buzz" Wagner with 14 P-39 "Airacobras" from the 35th and 36th Squadrons against Japanese targets at Lae, and Salamaua, New Guinea.

The next period of the 35th Fighter Squadron's history began in August 1943 when the unit began to transition from the P-39/P-400 "Airacobra" to the P-40N-5 "Warhawk". This

would prove to be the most historic and honored era of the unit's history.

Glen Holder's military career began when he was drafted into the U.S. Army on 1 August 1940. After basic training he joined the 31st Field Artillery stationed at Fort Ord, Monterey, California. With the 31st FA, he attained the rank of Sergeant. Glen was a gun crew lead Sergeant on a 75mm cannon team.

Having an interest in aircraft and flying, Glen had applied for flight training several months before, but his Battery Commander kept losing his papers. He wanted him to go to OCS and become a Field Artillery Officer. Glen was determined to become a military pilot. So, he made a new application for flight training, got a jeep from the motor pool and hand carried the forms to Moffett Field, Palo Alto, California. Glen took the four-hour flight exam and was accepted for the next available flight training class at the Cal Aero Academy, Ontario, California, in April 1942. Glen graduated and got his wings at Luke Field, Phoenix, Arizona, with class 43C on 10 March 1943, and was assigned to fighters. He then went to Hamilton Field, San Francisco, California and checked out in the P-39 "Airacobra." From there he went to Tonopah, Nevada and combat fighter training, again in the P-39. Glen was now ready for assignment to a combat unit and prepared to do his part in the war.

In mid May, 1943, Glen went to Australia via Hawaii, Fiji and New Caledonia aboard a C-87 (the transport version of the B-24). He arrived in Brisbane and was processed and assigned to the 35th Fighter Squadron of the 8th Fighter Group. From Brisbane he went to Townsville for pre-combat orientation by Capt White of the 35th FS and jungle survival training by Maj Blood of the RAAF.

July 1943, Glen arrived in New Guinea, combat ready and proud to be with the 35th Fighter Squadron "Black Panthers", aka "Cyclone's Flying Circus", then stationed at Kila strip (3-mile aerodrome) near Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. The 35th FS was flying the P-39/P-400 when Glen arrived and he completed 10 combat missions in this aircraft prior to the transition to the new P-40N-5 "Warhawk" during September 1943. The P-40N was the last production model of the P-40 series of fighters, and the best performer. Speed, range, and maneuverability, were superior to the prior models. The P-40N-5 aircraft assigned to the 35th fighter squadron in August 1943 had been field upgraded in Townsville, Australia to—25 specifications.

The squadron was under the command of Maj Emmett S. "Cyclone" Davis, a great man and a natural combat leader, considered one of the best combat fighter pilots in the entire USAAF.

During the 35th Fighter Squadron's P-40N combat tour (September 1943 - February 1944) Glen completed 98 combat missions, which consisted of bomber escort, fighter sweeps, intercepts, and ground attack missions. He claimed three confirmed air combat victories, and two probables while flying the P-40. The 35th posted the best air combat record of all "Warhawk" units in Fifth Fighter Command, and was awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation twice for missions over Cape Gloucester and again for an action over Saidor. The pilots of the 35th fighter squadron accounted for 63 air combat victories, and 7 probables during this period. The unit generated two aces, 1st Lt Dick "Lucky" West with 6 confirmed and 3 probables, and 1st Lt Lee "Scaly" Everhart with 5 confirmed and 1 probable.

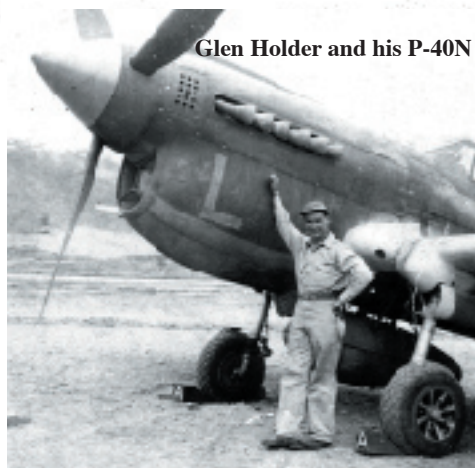
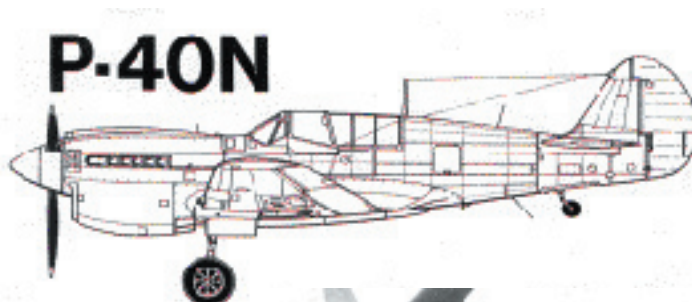
In December 1943 General Douglas MacArthur's forces undertook the occupation of western New Britain. D-day was set for 26 December 1943 and the U.S.M.C. was assigned the assault-landing task at Cape Gloucester, New Britain.

On 25 December 1943 a four-ship flight of P-40Ns of the 35th FS led by Capt Harold McClelland, was on a fighter sweep of the area around Arawe, New Britain. An hour into the mission Capt McClelland's wingman Lt Glen "Gabby" Holder sighted a lone aircraft in the distance at 12,000 ft., and called out the bogie to the flight. McClelland and the other flight members could not see the bogie, but Glen was sure it

was out there, so the flight leader told Lt Holder to pursue the aircraft and the flight would follow. Glen throttled-up and pursued the bogie. As he began to close he could see that it was a twin-engine aircraft, and could clearly see the large red roundels.

At 300 yards Holder opened fire on the enemy aircraft, which then began to make evasive turns. Lt Holder was unable to gain on the speedy enemy ship, but the pilot of the Japanese aircraft continued to make turns. This allowed Holder to gain enough advantage to set up a diving attack from the right side. As Glen gained on the bogie he could now tell that it was a Ki-46 "Dinah", and as the pursuit descended to 4,000 ft.,

Holder opened fire again at 150 yards, closing to 75 yards. Lt Holder saw the "Dinah" taking hits from his six .50 caliber machine guns all along the right side of the ship. Glens' hits set the Ki-46 on fire, from the wing-root and leading edge of the right wing and engine. The flames and smoke were very thick, and the enemy ship began to lose altitude rapidly and enter a



Glen Holder and his P-40N

diving turn to the right. Glen and the rest of the flight looked on as the “Dinah” continued its rapid descent toward the Solomon Sea some 1,000 ft. below. No parachutes were seen from the flame-engulfed aircraft, the crew having apparently been killed. All members of the flight confirmed that the enemy ship had crashed in flames into the sea.

The “Dinah” was Lt Holder’s first air combat victory. This engagement proved to be the first contact with the enemy for Operation DEXTERITY. As the mission of the Ki-46 “Dinah”, was high altitude reconnaissance, one can only speculate that some high ranking officers of the Imperial command staff at Rabaul would find that they were lacking some key intelligence for the coming day.

On 16 January 1944, the JAAF 6th Hiko Shidan launched 60 aircraft from the airdromes of Wewak and Madang to raid the Allied convoy providing supplies to the invasion force near Helmholtz point and the mouth of the Nankina river. Among the Japanese attack force were such notable pilots as Maj Takaji Kimura, CO of the 68th Sentai and a leading JAAF ace with 20+ victories, and Warrant Officer Takashi Noguchi, 3rd Chutai, 68th Sentai with 14 victories. The Japanese force was comprised of aircraft from the 59th, 63rd, 68th, 78th, and the 248th Sentai, and all pilots were experienced in combat.

The 35th fighter squadron launched 16 P-40Ns from Finschhafen to patrol the Saidor landing area. Leading the 35th on this mission was 1st Lt George Goolsby as the flight leader of red flight, with 1st Lt Glen C. Holder as his wingman Red flight was in low position at 8,000 feet.

The squadron had been patrolling above the convoy for around an hour when 1st Lt Lee Everhart, blue 3 element leader called out, “Bogies at 2 o’clock.” Blue flight was high at 12,000 feet. Forty Oscar’s and Tony’s were seen approaching from the north at 14,000-15,000 feet.

The pilots of four Japanese fighters made a diving attack on the 35th red flight. Holder saw a Tony making a tight turn onto his element leader’s tail. He radioed to his flight leader to warn him “Brandy red one, bandit on your tail”, and then turned to engage the enemy. Holder turned his Warhawk into and behind the Ki-61 as the enemy pilot tried to maneuver away by quickly initiating a dive, but “Gabby” stayed on the Tony’s tail. Lt Holder fired a burst from his six .50 caliber machine guns at 10-degree deflection/down and observed the right wing-root and engine area explode in a plume of flames and parts. Holder then pulled directly behind the stricken Tony and closed to within 50 yards, and prepared to fire another burst when he

saw the fighter pitch down and to the right, and the form of the pilot begin to emerge from the flaming cockpit. Lt Holder rolled his Warhawk to avoid the burning and smoking Tony as he passed. Gabby looked as his adversary came completely out of the aircraft through the thick black smoke and flames. As Holder pulled out of his victory, he caught a glimpse of what he thought might be the parachute of the Tony pilot, but in the confusion of combat he could not be sure.

The pilot of this Kawasaki fighter Ki-61 “Tony” was W/O Takashi Noguchi, 3rd Chutai, 68th Sentai. Noguchi bailed and parachuted into the Bismarck Sea some 5,000 ft. below. Takashi was injured in the left arm and was recovered unconscious in the water by an Allied destroyer that had been witness to the aerial melee in the skies above.

As “Gabby” rolled out of the engagement with the Tony he saw a lone Ki-43-II Oscar flying low over the water. Holder made a diving attack on the Japanese aircraft, which made a slow turn to the right. Glen set up for a high deflection shot and led the enemy ship, squeezing off a long burst from his guns. The Oscar passed right through his gunfire, tracers striking the target along the forward and central fuselage. As Holder pulled around he observed the Oscar continue its turn to the right, diving into the waters of the Vitiaz Strait at a 30-degree angle, the pilot having apparently been killed.

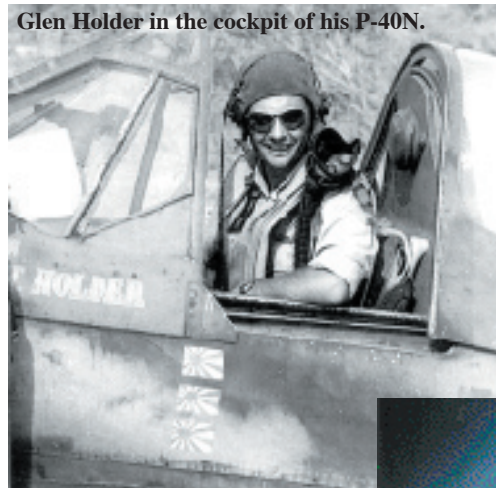
The combat lasted for 30 minutes. This mission would set the World War II record for Fifth Fighter Command for air combat victories by a single squadron during a single engagement.

The tally was nineteen confirmed victories, and three probable, with no 35th FS loss. During this historic combat Lt Everhart made ace, and Captain soon after. 1st Lt Glen C. “Gabby” Holder was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions during this record engagement.

This would be the last air combat for the 35th FS while flying the Curtis P-40N “Warhawk.” The unit began to transition to the Lockheed P-38 “Lightning” during February 1944.

John Holder lives in Austin, Texas. Glen resides in the Army Retirement Center, San Antonio.

(Photos: Author’s Collection)



Glen Holder in the cockpit of his P-40N.



Col. Glen Holder