
Odds and Ends

A Double Story

Have you ever wondered how Chicago O'Hare International Airport got its name? Read on.

Edward H. "Butch" O'Hare was born on March 13, 1914 in St. Louis, the son of "E.J." O'Hare, a wealthy businessman and attorney. His parents sent him to Western Military Academy (WMA) at age 13, where he pursued an interest in marksmanship, becoming president of the rifle club. In 1932, he graduated from WMA, and in 1933 went on to the US Naval Academy. When he finished his naval aviation training, he was assigned to VF-3, the USS Saratoga's Fighting Squadron. VF-3 was flying the Grumman F3F-I biplane. In July, 1940, Butch O'Hare made his first carrier landing, "just about the most exciting thing a pilot can do in peacetime."

L/Cmr John S. Thach the Executive Officer of VF-3 hailed from Fordyce, Arkansas and the Academy Class of 1927. By early 1942 Thach was a highly experienced aviator with some 3,500 hours flight time and with definite ideas on fighter tactics. He had grown up hunting pheasant, and believed that any pilot with a similar background was potentially good VF material. Therefore, he stressed gunnery and teamwork. It was a philosophy shared by one of his pilots; dark, husky Lt. "Butch" O'Hare from St. Louis and Chicago. Not quite twenty-eight, O'Hare, Class of 1937 US Naval Academy had been with the Thach crew since joining Fighting Three in 1940. Thach and O'Hare part of the squadron gunnery team which captured the fleet trophy flying F3Fs biplanes. While training the pilots of VF-3 Thach would knock the new pilots down a notch by outflying them. He would let a rookie gain an altitude advantage and then, while reading a newspaper, he would out maneuver him and get on his tail. But when he tried this with O'Hare, he couldn't gain an advantage. Thach closely mentored the promising young pilot. In early 1941, VF-3 transferred to Enterprise. By the end of 1940, Jimmy Thach and his intense training had produced a passel of sharpshooters, including O'Hare.

From Pearl Harbor through May 4, 1942, U.S. Navy pilots and aerial gunners accounted for only 24 Japanese aircraft destroyed and another 3 probably destroyed. The U.S. Navy had only one ace on its rolls, the aggressive fighter pilot Butch O'Hare.

On February 20, 1942 Japanese Navy pilots were set to attack the Lexington flying in two waves of eight and nine planes each. The G4Ms (Bettys) dark-green oblong shapes making 170 knots, were dangerously close to the Lexington before the first



shots were fired. The Bettys were each armed with two 550 pound bombs.

Jimmy Thach led three of his pilots in a hasty scramble, and personally caught two of the fleeting Bettys. He splashed one himself and shared the second. But as a reserve, "Butch" O'Hare and Lt. Jg (junior grade) Marion Dufilho were kept flying near the ship, should the bombers get too close to the Lexington. Fourteen of VF-3s 16 operational fighters were now committed, and two of those had been shot down. Some of the Japanese

gunners were marksmen; Thach saw a direct hit on one F4F's canopy and watched the Grumman dive into the water.

At 1700, just a half-hour after the first radar plot, another threat appeared on the Lexington's radar screen. But this time it was much closer and on the disengaged side of the task force. Nine miles to the east, eight more Bettys bored in-the second wave from Rabaul, completely unopposed. It fell to O'Hare and Dufilho, who flew out on a 080 degrees track, and rolled in from starboard on a high side run as the Bettys descended in a fast, shallow dive towards the carrier." Butch" O'Hare now flying the Grumman F4F Wildcat, was cool and professional. He made only beam or quartering runs, denying the deadly tail gunners a clear shot at him. He held his fire until about 100 yards out, then triggered his four .50-calibers in short, precise bursts against the nearest bomber in the formation. The starboard engine gushed smoke which turned to flame, and O'Hare shifted targets. He continued his run, slanting down into the formation, and in the same pass engaged the next in line. Only then did O'Hare realize he was alone. Dufilho's guns had jammed from the same damnable feed problem which had vexed F4F squadrons for months. O'Hare was on his own against six bombers. On his next pass O'Hare concentrated on the two bombers trailing on the left side of the formation. Again closing the range to make sure, he flamed one Betty which dropped out, and pressed his run on the next in line. This bomber exploded as O'Hare's bullets found the engine and fuel tank.

By now the surviving five Bettys were within gun range of the task force's anti aircraft fire. Despite flak bursts snapping around the formation and tracers from every bomber which could line up a gun, O'Hare dived in for a third pass, again from portside. He blew up the leader, and then there was nothing more he could do. Four Bettys pressed their attack, dropping bombs with-

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