

The Many Names of CURTISS P-40 42-105202

by William J. Bennett, TSgt. CaANG; 146 TAW HISTORIAN.

All photos courtesy of Col. R. M. DeHaven, USAFR (Ret.).

Battling the Imperial Japanese in 1943, the pilots of the 49th Fighter Group, USAAF, did not find much available for off-duty amusement in the jungles of New Guinea. The mess sergeants did their best with what they had, but the cuisine was nothing to write home about, unless one wished to instigate the sending of a "care package" or few. The one true highlight of the day was mail call—those lovely bits of paper bringing pieces of home to GIs stationed in places that they had never heard of before finding themselves assigned there.

One enterprising P-40 pilot was able to maintain a correspondence with several young ladies in the Zone of the Interior as the (then) 48 states was called in military language. There were four that he especially wanted to encourage to continue writing to him, so he hit upon the idea of naming his aircraft after them and sending a photo of himself with it. Since it would be rather undiplomatic (and unwise) to have all four names on simultaneously, the pilot and his crew chief painted the name "BEV" on the engine cowl. With the pilot posing in front of his aircraft, the crew chief took a few photos. Then they wiped it clean and replaced "BEV" with "CLAIRE" and took some more photos. "CLAIRE" was then replaced with "KATHY" which was soon followed by "MARIE." Each girl had a photo of *his* airplane with *her* name on it. The flow of letters continued unabated.

This subterfuge would probably never have come to light save that the pilot had become a 14-victory fighter ace; hence his aircraft was a reasonably good subject for some scale model airplane builders. Attempts to determine the correct "name" of it became a bit muddled after different people had come up with some conflicting names of it after having seen a photo of his aircraft. This confusion lasted until at a model building society meeting, Col. Robert M. DeHaven, USAFR (Ret.), giving a talk on WWII air combat in the Southwest Pacific area, was asked about the markings of the P-40 he had flown in combat. He then told the above story on himself to explain why there was the confusion of the markings on his P-40N, s/n 42-105202. He always had a No. 13 on "his" aircraft that he flew in combat and later he added an orchid to it. This personal number and marking were carried over when his group switched to flying Lockheed P-38s.

After the war, Col. DeHaven became a member of the 146th Fighter Wing, California Air National Guard (it is now known as a Tactical Airlift Wing) until he retired from military service. Thus, this tidbit of aviation history comes directly to the author from the perpetrator, Col. DeHaven. •



Lt. Bob DeHaven in New Guinea with "BEV."



Lt. Bob DeHaven in New Guinea with "CLAIRE."



Lt. Bob DeHaven in New Guinea with "KATHY."



Lt. Bob DeHaven in New Guinea with "MARIE."