



John T. Blackburn, Captain, USN
(Naval Aviator Number 5153)

John Thomas Blackburn was born in Annapolis Maryland, on June 24, 1912, son of Captain Paul P. Blackburn, Sr., and Mrs (Nell G. Carey) Blackburn He attended Western High School in Washington, D.C., and prepared for Naval service at Severn School, Severna Park, Maryland. He entered the U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, by Presidential appointment on June 17, 1929, and while there as a Midshipman participated in soccer and water polo. Graduated and commissioned Ensign on June 1, 1933, he subsequently advanced in rank, attaining that of Captain, to date from July 1, 1952.

After graduation from the Naval Academy in June 1933, he was assigned to the USS *Mississippi*, in which he served first as a junior Watch and. Division Officer, and from June 1935 to February 1936 as Aviation Observer. In March 1936 he reported to the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, where he completed flight training and was designated Naval Aviator on February 26, 1937, prior to his detachment in April of that year. During the next year he was assigned to Bombing Squadron 5 of Fleet Air Detachment, Naval Air Station, San Diego, California later redesignated Bombing Squadron 2, and based on the USS *Lexington*. In June 1939 he was transferred to Fighting Squadron 2, also based on the *Lexington*, and served. as a fighter pilot, with collateral duty in Engineering, until February 1941.

In March 1941 he reported to the Naval Air Station, Miami,, Florida, and was serving as a Fighter Plane Instructor when the United States entered World War II in December of that year. He was detached in June 1942, and the same month assumed command of Fighting Squadron 29 at the Fleet Air Detachment, Norfolk, Virginia. He remained in that command for six months, during which his squadron was based on the USS *Santee* operating in European waters. In December 1942 he fitted out Fighting Squadron 17, and served as Commanding Officer from its commissioning, in January 1943, until May 1944, the squadron based on the USS *Bunker Hill* during part of that time. For outstanding service in that

command, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and a Gold Star in lieu of the second Distinguished Flying Cross, later replaced by the Navy Cross. The citations follow, in part:

Distinguished Flying Cross: "For heroism and extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as Squadron Commander of U.S. Navy Fighting Squadron 17, in action against enemy Japanese forces in the Solomon Islands Area from October 27 to December 1, 1943. Braving fierce enemy anti-aircraft fire and fighter opposition, Commander (then Lieutenant Commander) courageously and skillfully led his squadron on numerous hazardous missions pressing home effective attacks against Japanese shipping and airfields and, during three bitter engagements with hostile fighters.at Empress Bay, Bougainville, personally shot down four of the enemy craft and damaged five others..,"

Navy Cross: "For extraordinary heroism as Commanding Officer of Fighting Squadron 17 during action against enemy Japanese forces in the vicinity of New Britain, Solomon Islands, from January 26 to February 26, 1944. Engaging in continuous operations throughout this period, (he) led his squadron in numerous successful escort missions and fighter sweeps over the enemy-held stronghold of Rabaul. Intercepted by an outnumbering force of hostile aircraft on January 26 and 30, he courageously closed with the enemy planes and personally blasted three from the sky and probably destroyed three others. In a subsequent engagement with a numerically superior force of Japanese aircraft on February 6, (he) struck furiously at the oncoming hostile planes, personally shooting down four and severely damaging two others. Sighting an enemy auxiliary schooner off Pondo Point on February 9, he led. his flight in a series of daring strafing runs to sink the hostile vessel..."

He was awarded the Air Medal and two Gold Stars in lieu of additional awards for meritorious achievement in aerial flight in the Solomon Islands area, the first from October 29 to November 21, 1943, during which period he completed five missions; the second on November 8, 1943, when he destroyed an enemy plane in a raid on Buka; and the third on November 11, 1943, when he provided cover for aircraft carriers at night and destroyed an enemy plane. He is also entitled to the Ribbons for, and facsimiles of, the Presidential Unit Citation awarded the USS *Santee* and the Navy Unit Commendation awarded Fighting Squadron 17.

Returning to the United States in March 1944, he had brief temporary duty in June 1944 in the Naval Air Operational Training Command, Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Florida, and on June 15, reported to the Navy Department, Washington D. C., for duty as Head of the Fighter Requirements Section, Military Requirements Division, Bureau of Aeronautics. During that period he was an Observer of the Second Battle of the Philippine Sea, October 22-26, 1944. He was detached in April 1945 and a month later became Commander Air Group 74, based on Midway. He served in that command

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for fifteen months, returning to the Navy Department in September 1946.

After a year's duty in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, assigned to the Office of the, Special Assistant to the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Air), he served from October 1947 to October 1949 in the Bureau of Aeronautics (Fighter Design Branch). He then joined the USS *Saipan* as Executive Officer, serving in that capacity until May 1951. From June of that year until July of the next, he commanded Composite Squadron 5, after which he was a student at the Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, where he completed the Strategy and Tactics course in June 1953.

He was next assigned to the Joint Strategic Plans Group, Joint Chief of Staff,, in Washington, D. C. , and, (under orders of March 18, 1955) served as Commander Heavy Attack Wing ONE, based at the Naval Auxiliary Air Base, Sanford, Florida. On May 31, 1957, he was ordered to the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Navy Department thence to the Naval Air Training Command, Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, for temporary duty. In September 1957 he joined the Staff of Commander Naval Air Force, Pacific.

In addition to the Navy Cross, Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with two Gold Stars and Ribbons for the Presidential Unit Citation (*Santee*) and the Navy Unit Commendation (VF-17), Captain Blackburn has the American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Clasp; American Campaign Medal; European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with one engagement star; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with three stars; World War II Victory Medal; Navy occupation Service Medal, Europe Clasp; and the National Defense Service Medal.

Married in 1935 to Miss Rosalie Reed of Washington, D.C., Captain Blackburn had two children: Mark W. Blackburn and Patricia A. Blackburn.

Captain Blackburn was a member of a real Navy family. Besides his father, was a graduate of the Class of 1904, USNA, he has a brother, Captain Paul P. Blackburn, Jr., graduated in 1930. An uncle, Lieutenant Commander C. K. Blackburn, USN, now deceased, was graduated in 1916.