



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
AIR FORCE HISTORICAL RESEARCH AGENCY  
MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

HQ AFHRA/RSO  
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600 Chennault Circle  
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6 April 2000

Mr. George T. Chandler  
Second Yamamoto Mission Association  
Drawer N  
223 South Main  
Pratt, KS 67124

Dear Mr. Chandler:

Thank you for your 28 March 2000 letter requesting documentation on the original decision to split the credit for shooting down the Yamamoto bomber between Rex Barber and Thomas Lanphier.

The original intelligence report on the Yamamoto mission suggested that the P-38 pilots in the attack flight had shot down three Japanese bombers in the vicinity of Bougainville, two over the island, and one over the sea (attachment 1).

Cards prepared for USAF Historical Study number 85, USAF Credits for the Destruction of Enemy Aircraft, World War II, seem to be all that is left of the "working papers". Two cards for Lanphier and Barber on 18 April 1943 suggest that a 1.00 on each card was changed to .50 (attachment 2). Apparently Lanphier and Barber were each going to be given credit for shooting down a bomber over Bougainville, but the credit was split.

The original count of World War II aerial victory credits was begun under the supervision of Dr. Maurer Maurer, then Chief of the Historical Studies Branch. Notes from 1969 by Dr. Maurer explain that the credit for the Yamamoto bomber was split between Barber and Lanphier when he and his staff discovered that only one bomber went down over Bougainville (attachment 3). Subsequent evidence confirmed that there were only two Betty bombers in the Yamamoto flight (attachment 4).

I hope this answers your questions about the origins of the split credit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Daniel L. Haulman".

DANIEL L. HAULMAN

①

# Appendix A

## XIII Fighter Command Debriefing

13th FIGHTER COMMAND DETACHMENT  
APO #709

SUBJECT: Fighter Interception  
TO: Commanding General, USAFISPA

1. **Date:** April 18, 1943.  
**Time:** Take-off 0725—Return 1140.  
**Place:** Kahili-Shortland Area.
2. **Weather:** Ceiling and Visibility Unlimited.
3. **Our Forces:** 16 P-38's.  
**Enemy Forces:** 3 Type 1 M/B "Betty" and 6 Type O SSF "Zeke".
4. **Our Losses:** 1 P-38.  
**Enemy Losses:** 3 Type 1 M/B "Betty" and 3 Type O SSF "Zeke".
5. **Target:** Special information was received, advising the command that an enemy bomber, with fighter escort, would proceed from Buka to the Kahili area on the morning of April 18th. Sixteen Lightnings were ordered to the point of interception to attack and destroy the bombers. Of these, four were designated to act as the attacking section, with the balance as their protective cover. Major Mitchell was named as the flight leader.
6. **Fighter Pilots:**
  - a). **Attacking Section:**
    - Capt. Thomas G. Lanphier, Jr.
    - 1st. Lt. Rex T. Barber.
    - 1st. Lt. Besby T. Holmes.
    - 1st. Lt. Raymond K. Hine.
  - b). **Cover:**
    - Major John W. Mitchell.
    - 1st Lt. Julius Jacobson.
    - 1st Lt. Douglas S. Canning.

1st Lt. Delton C. Goerke.  
 Major Louis R. Kittel.  
 2nd Lt. Gordon Whittaker.  
 1st Lt. Roger J. Ames.  
 1st Lt. Lawrence A. Graebner.  
 1st Lt. Everett H. Anglin.  
 1st Lt. William K. Smith.  
 1st Lt. Eldon E. Stratton.  
 1st Lt. Albert R. Long.

7. **The Action:** From the takeoff at Cactus, the flight went 410 miles over the circuitous all-water route, flying all the way at an altitude of 10 to 30 feet above the water. The course had been figured and timed so that the interception most probably would take place upon the approach of the P-38's to the Southwestern coast of Bougainville at the designated time of 0935. As this point was reached *the Enemy was sighted*.

It was almost as if the affair had been pre-arranged with the mutual consent of friend and foe.

The picture was this: the Lightnings were at 30 feet, heading in toward the coast, and just about to begin to get their altitude for the presumed attack. The enemy was sighted, in a "V", about 3 miles distant proceeding down the Southern coastline toward Kihili [Kahili]. The two bombers were together, flying at 4500 feet, with two sections—3 Zeros each—1500 feet above them and slightly to the rear. As the enemy force, apparently unaware of opposition, pursued his course, Mitchell led his covering group in their climb for altitude, ultimately reaching 15-18000 feet, from which point they stood their protecting vigil. Lanphier led his force parallel to the course of the enemy, flying in toward them a bit, and indicating 200 MPH, in his 35° climb. The P-38's actually climbed at 2200 feet per minute. When level with the bombers, and about 2 miles away, Lanphier and Barber dropped their belly tanks and swung in to the attack at 280 MPH indicated. Holmes had difficulty in releasing his tank, and Hine remained with him until he could do so.

When Lanphier and Barber were within one mile of contact, their attack was observed by the enemy. The bombers nosed down, one started a 360° turn dive, the other going out and away toward the shoreline; the Zeros dropped their belly tanks and three peeled down, in a string, to intercept Lanphier. When he saw that he could not reach the bomber he turned up and into the Zeros, exploding the first, and firing into the others as they passed. By this time he had reached 6000 feet, so he nosed over, and went down to the tree tops after his escaping objective. He came

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into it broadside—fired his bursts—a wing flew off and the plane went flaming to earth. 1

The Zeros were now pursuing him and had the benefit of altitude. His mission accomplished, he hedgehopped the tree tops and made desperate maneuvers to escape. He kicked rudders, slipped and skidded, tracers were flying past his plane,—but he finally outran them. In all the action he had received two 7.7's in his horizontal stabilizer.

Barber had gone in with Lanphier on the initial attack. He went for one of the bombers but its maneuvers caused him to overshoot a little. He whipped back, however, and although pursued by Zeros, caught the bomber and destroyed it. When he fired, the tail section flew off, the bomber turned over on its back and plummeted to earth. 2

By this time, Holmes had been able to drop his tank and with Hine, who had stayed in formation with him, came in to ward off the Zeros who were pursuing Barber. A dogfight ensued, many shots were exchanged, but results were not observed. The flight was on its way out of the combat area (in the neighborhood of enemy bases at Kahili, Ballale and Shortland-Faisi) when Holmes noticed a stray bomber near Moila Point flying low over the water. He dove on it, his bursts getting it smoking in the left engine; Hine also shot at it and Barber polished it off with a burst in the fuselage. The bomber exploded "right in my face"; a piece of the plane flew off, cut through his left wing and knocked out his left inner cooler and other chunks left paint streaks on his wing—so close was his attack driven home. 3

Holmes, Hine and Barber then turned up for home, their mission—to destroy the bombers—a complete success. However, Zeros were coming in on Barber's tail and Holmes whipped up and around and shot one down in flames. Another attempt to draw away ended in another dogfight during which Barber exploded a further Zero. During these minutes, Hine's left engine started to smoke and he was last seen losing altitude south of Shortland Island. It is believed that Hine also accounted for a Zero as a total of three enemy fighters were seen to fall into the sea during this part of the combat.

Barber and Holmes were forced to use extreme evasive measures in order to successfully escape from the enemy hotbed and their course out, as was Lanphier's, was further complicated by the sight of a huge cloud of dust fanning out from a swarm of planes taking off from Kahili airfield. Holmes eventually ran out of gas and made a successful emergency landing at the Russell Islands, from which he later brought his plane safely home to base. The damage to the cooling system of Barber's left motor prevented

him from pulling more than 30 inches of mercury at low levels and 25 inches at 4/5,000 feet but despite this limitation to his speed and rate of climb he also brought his plane safely home to base.

8. **Comment:** The success of this extraordinary mission—a 425 mile interception by land planes largely over water—was due in large measure to the leadership of Major Mitchell. On the eve of the flight, the mission was thoroughly explained to each pilot—there were no generalities. Each minute detail was discussed, with nothing taken for granted; take-off procedure, flight altitude, exactly when and how to drop belly tanks, radio silence, the tremendous importance of precise timing and position of covering elements, until Major Mitchell was sure that each of his pilots knew both his part and that of each other pilot from take-off to return.

The results bear witness to the thoroughness of this briefing. Radio silence was absolute until Canning's quiet "Eleven o'clock" announced contact with the enemy. The timing resulting from Major Mitchell's close control of the flight's speed and the unwavering formation maintained was so exact that the enemy was met on the minute, where a few minutes' delay would have meant complete failure. The covering flight covered the combat action—as it should have—and when help was called for by the attacking element, Major Mitchell immediately diverted the pre-arranged section and the balance remained on station. This discipline—intelligent discipline—was throughout the mission flawless, not one of the twelve covering planes yielded to the temptation to peel off and mix it with the enemy.

Once again the following fundamental principles of modern, organized air attack—the first instruction which new pilots receive from Col. Viccellio—have proven their soundness: "When you are on a mission, whether leading a flight or flying a wing, know exactly what your mission is, where you are going and how to get back—and be on time".

**Distribution:**

W-2, MAW, APO 709  
Fighter Intelligence, APO 709  
Strike Intelligence, APO 709  
CO, 13th Fighter Command, APO 708  
A-2, 13th Air Force, APO 708  
G-2, USAFISPA, APO 502  
NACI, COMSOPAC, APO 502  
S-2, 347th Fighter Group, APO 502  
S-2, 18th Fighter Group, APO 709

Army Intelligence

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BARBER, REX T.

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Same a/c

NAME 1-30 (LAST, FIRST, MI)

FILE 70-

RANK	31	32	33													
SERIAL NR	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44					
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UNIT (NR/FUNC/ECH)	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57							
THEATER	58	59	60													
CREDIT (WH/FR)	61	62	63	* 050								Med. Barb Betty B.				
DATE (DAY/MO/YR)	64	65	66	67	68	69						P-38				
SOURCES VCB													NOTES			
ORDER													751.375.1 P-38 gives credit from M-B Yamamoto Raid - no other credits this date			
UNIT HIST	XIII FTR (M List - 751.375.1 - (credit)												* See Yamamoto file			
OPS RPT	Summary on Yamato file												Credit w/ TG. Lanphier for 1/2			

ASI FORM 0-2  
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LANPHIER, THOMAS G, JR.

ASI-HS  
WORLD WAR II  
VICTORY CREDIT

NAME 1-30 (LAST, FIRST, MI)

FILE 70-

RANK	31	32	33													
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DATE (DAY/MO/YR)	64	65	66	67	68	69										
SOURCES VCB													NOTES			
ORDER													Award of WW2 CROSS by P-38 COMDR. SOPAC, 17 JUN 43 in Lanphier file. Gives him full credit. Yamamoto Mission File = 1/2 Betty w/ R.T. BARBER.			
UNIT HIST	70 FG Hist JUN-JUN 43 gives credit												751.375.1 - gives 1 HTR, 1 Bm this date			
OPS RPT	Summary on Yamato file												XIII FTR list gives M-B			

ASI FORM 0-2  
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file: Yamamoto

Who Got Yamamoto?

1. Credit is usually given to Lanphier. Some people believe it should go to Barber. Both men claimed the credit.
2. There seems to be no question about the following:
  - a. There were two Betty bombers in the flight carrying Yamamoto.
  - b. One of these Bettys was shot down over, and crashed in, the sea.
  - c. The other, carrying Yamamoto, was shot down over, and crashed in, the jungle.
3. U.S. reports, however, show three Betty's shot down:
  - a. One by Lanphier, over the jungle.
  - b. One by Barber, over the jungle.
  - c. One over the sea, with Holmes, Hine and Barber taking part in the attack.
4. Where did the third Betty come from? Or were there only two? Did Lanphier and Barber attack the same Betty over the jungle?
5. Burke Davis, Get Yamamoto, is sure that there were only two Bettys. Referring to the U.S. reports, in our Archives, he says (p. 229), "Without exception these documents reflect the contemporary misconception that three Japanese bombers were shot down on the mission." This misconception, Davis says (p. 183), was the result of the failure of intelligence officers to straighten out the facts during or immediately after interrogation of the pilots. Lanphier and Barber each reported a bomber shot down over the jungle, so Intelligence counted two, which, when added to the one shot down over the sea, made a total of three.
6. After describing Barber's (p. 161) and Lanphier's (p. 163) combat, Davis says (p. 165) "Each man was positive he had shot down a Betty over the jungle." Davis notes, however, that Barber later thought that both attacks were on the same bomber. "Though the American pilots would not realize it until years later," Davis says (p. 164), "only one Japanese bomber had fallen in the jungle, carrying Yamamoto..... to death."
7. Davis' statement and explanation of the misconception about the number of bombers shot down is convincing. No one, in any sources I have yet seen, has offered sound evidence that there actually were three Bettys.

8. At this point I believe, as Davis apparently does, that credit for shooting down Yamamoto's bomber should be shared (equally, in my opinion) by Lanphier and Barber.

9. Although the bomber shot down over the sea was credited to Holmes, Barber played an important part. The combat report of COMAIRSOLS says he "polished it off" after Holmes had attacked. Hine also shot at the bomber, but there is nothing to indicate that he hit it, and Barber said that Hine fired far ahead of the bomber. From available information, I believe that credit for this bomber should be divided equally between Holmes and Barber.

Maurer  
7/2/69

## Chapter 4

# Interviews with Mr. Kenji Yanagiya, Major General John P. Condon, USMC (Ret.), and Mr. Hiroshi Hayashi

*This interview of Kenji Yanagiya was conducted by R. Cargill Hall on 15 April 1988 in Fredericksburg, Texas. Mr. Makoto Shinagawa acted as translator for Mr. Yanagiya.*

**Hall:** This is an interview, 15 April 1988, with Kenji Yanagiya, and with his translator, Makoto Shinagawa. Actually, it might be best if you just read these questions in Japanese; subsequently, you will have to interrupt periodically to translate so that he doesn't go on at such a length that you cannot remember.

**Shinagawa:** So I won't have to repeat the question in English. Good. Is this going into one single tape—I cannot do a simultaneous translation, right? All you hear is a voice doubling—in other words, you don't have a separate tape recorder to tape my voice onto another?

**Hall:** There's a single tape running with three mikes.

**Shinagawa:** Okay, good. Can we start?

**Hall:** Yes.

**Shinagawa** [asks Yanagiya the first question in Japanese]: Full name, rank, branch of military service at time of flight with Admiral Yamamoto in April 1943.

[Yanagiya replies.]

**Shinagawa:** I believe it can be translated as Warrant Officer of the Imperial Navy at the time of the Yamamoto Mission, Kenji Yanagiya. He belonged to the 204th Air Division.

**Shinagawa** [asks the ninth question]: Thinking back to 18 April 1943, to the best of your recollection, tell me about the mission events prior to the encounter with the American P-38s, that is, your launch time and destination, weather on the way, navigation checkpoints, and manner of radio contact, etc.

[Yanagiya replies.]

**Shinagawa**: Of course it happened forty-some odd years ago, memory is fading, and it doesn't appear as if it really happened as he recalls. But he said that at 6 o'clock in the morning they left the airport and the weather was clear and nicer than the average—the visibility was very good. They could observe some thunderclouds in the distance. They were flying the coastline with the Bougainville mountains on the left-hand side, thinking that if Americans come to attack the planes they cannot come from the mountains—they would naturally come from the sea, so they were flying with the mountains on the left-hand side with the two bombers, with Admiral Yamamoto flying at 2,500 meters and us [fighter pilots] flying on the right rear of the bombers at an altitude of 3,000 meters, 500 meters higher than the bombers, knowing and thinking that if they were to be attacked, then we can protect them from the rear.

**Hall**: All right.

**Shinagawa** [asks the tenth question]: What was the situation just before the encounter: the altitude and disposition of Japanese aircraft, visibility in the area, the heading, distance, and flight time remaining to destination?

[Yanagiya replies.]

**Shinagawa**: Of course the disposition of the Japanese planes was foretated in question 9. From Rabaul to Buin, which was the airport, the distance flying time of two hours, he doesn't recall the distance.

**Hall**: Remaining?

**Shinagawa**: No. That is the total distance. They could see the [Buin] airfield at the time of the encounter, so he assumed that they must have been only ten minutes away from the airfield.

[Yanagiya interjects in conversation.]

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