

MAJOR REX T. BARBER, USAAF

Born on 6 May 1917 in Culver, Oregon, Rex Theodore Barber graduated from Oregon State University in 1940. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps on 30 September 1940, serving as a private first class until he was accepted for pilot training in March 1941.

Following graduation with Class 41-H at Mather Field, California on 31 October 1941, Lieutenant Barber was assigned to the 70th Fighter Squadron, 35th Fighter Group, and sent to the Fiji Islands, arriving there on 12 January 1942. He scored one victory with the 70th, a twin-engine Nell on 28 December 1942, before the pilots of the 70th were integrated into the 339th Fighter Squadron when they converted into P-38s. He was credited with his next two victories, a pair of Zeros downed near Cape Esperance, on 7 April 1943.

Barber became an ace on 18 April on one of the war's most memorable fighter missions. Following a 400-mile low-level flight led by Major John Mitchell, he and Captain Tom Lanphier inter-

cepted and attacked the Betty bomber carrying Japanese Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, Commander of the Japanese Combined Fleet. As Lanphier turned to attack a flight of Zeros defending the bomber, Barber pressed the attack and shot down the Betty. He continued on to finish off another Betty under attack by squadronmate Lieutenant Frank Holmes, and also downed a Zero. Barber and Lanphier were subsequently given equal credit for downing Yamamoto's bomber.

Barber later had a second combat tour, serving with the 449th Fighter Squadron in China. Returning to the States, he commanded the 29th Fighter Squadron, 412th Fighter Group, and later the 1st Fighter Group's 27th Fighter Squadron, flying P-59As and P-80s out of March Field, California. He retired as a colonel on 1 April 1961.

Tally record: 5 confirmed, 2 probables and 2 damaged

Decorations: Navy Cross, Silver Star with one Oak Leaf Cluster, Purple Heart, Air Medal and the Air Force Commendation Medal

