

# HEROES OF PEARL HARBOR

RECALLING THE EXPLOITS OF GEORGE WELCH AND KENNETH TAYLOR ON 7 DECEMBER. ISN'T IT TIME THEY RECEIVED THE MEDAL OF HONOR?

BY JAMES THOMPSON

Artwork by Adam Tooby depicts George Welch getting airborne from Wheeler Field. The art was used for an Airfix 1/48th P-40B scale model kit.



**P**ulling the stick of his Curtiss P-40B back into his lap, Lt. George Welch also jammed the throttle of the Allison V-1710 full forward as he felt the enemy bullets slam into the fuselage of the rugged Curtiss fighter. With nose pointed almost straight up, Welch kicked in right rudder as he felt the beginnings of a stall, pushed the stick forward, and then roared back down to re-engage the enemy who had rolled off to the right. The date was 7 December 1941, and George Welch was about to become an American hero — yet a hero never fully honored and a man whose daring exploits are nearly forgotten on this 80th anniversary of the Japanese

sneak attack on Pearl Harbor.

On that fateful day some eight long decades ago, Welch was a 21-year-old Air Corps pilot assigned to the 47th Pursuit Squadron, 15th Pursuit Group, based at Wheeler Field in idyllic Oahu, Hawaii. On 6 December 1941, life seemed almost perfect. Stationed at one of the most beautiful military locations in the world, Welch wore his shiny lieutenant's bars with pride but his road to becoming an Air Corps pursuit pilot had not been particularly straightforward.

Born as George Lewis Schwartz Jr. on 10 May 1918 in Wawaset Park, Wilmington, Delaware, his parents were George

Lewis Schwartz Sr. and Julia Ann Welch. The Great War was raging and any German-sounding name was greatly suspect — especially on the East Coast and Midwest where there were many people of German ancestry. George Sr., working as a leading research chemist for the Dupont Experimental Test Station in Wilmington, had become the butt of some anti-German remarks. Worried about his new-born son, he changed the child's name to George Schwartz Welch — using his mother's maiden name.

From surviving records, George's early life seems pretty much like thousands of other young children of the time.

He and his family survived the Great Spanish Flu outbreak of 1918/1920 with a younger brother being born in 1920. George would attend St. Andrew's School in New Castle County, Delaware, where he developed an interest in engineering. Interestingly, the private school had been started in 1929 by Felix du Pont, one of the heirs of the family that made its fortune in chemicals so perhaps George's father had some influence in getting his son into the institution — especially since George Sr. was constantly rising in position at Dupont.

After completing St. Andrew's in 1937, George was accepted into Purdue

University where he completed two years of study on a mechanical engineering degree. However, like thousands of other young men George watched the world situation with a keen interest as war and political unrest began to take a foothold in the Far East and in Europe. He decided to put his studies on hold and apply for the Army Air Corps. Doing this, he found there were a lot more applicants than available slots in the pre-war Air Corps (some referred to the Air Corps of the 1930s as a "flying country club") and he was advised to return to school until his assignment number was called up. He did this, returning to school in September

1939 (the month Hitler invaded Poland) but at the start of 1940 he received his orders to report for basic training as the demand for pilots was suddenly skyrocketing.

George soon found himself as a cog in the expanding training machine that was turning out high-quality pilots. He underwent primary, basic, and advanced training at Brooks Field, Kelly Field, Randolph Field, and Hamilton Field. Receiving his wings and commissioned a second lieutenant during January 1941, he soon found himself posted to the 47th Pursuit Squadron, 15th Pursuit Group, at Wheeler Field in Oahu, Hawaii, where