

# CHINA BLITZERS!

THE 26th FIGHTER SQUADRON AT  
WAR IN THE CHINA/BURMA/INDIA THEATER - PART ONE  
BY STEVE BLAKE

When World War II aviation enthusiasts think about the air war in the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater what most likely come to mind initially are the "Flying Tigers" — the Chinese Air Force's American Volunteer Group — and its equally famous successor, the US Army Air Force's (USAAF) 23rd Fighter Group (FG). However, they were by no means the only Allied fighter units opposing the Japanese in that remote part of the world.

One of those other, relatively unsung, outfits that also contributed to the Allied victory in the CBI was the 51st FG, which had been activated as a Pursuit Group (PG) by what was then the US Army Air Corps at Hamilton Field, near San Francisco, California, in January 1941. It was comprised of the 16th, 25th, and 26th Pursuit Squadrons (PG). The 26th's first commanding officer was 2nd

Lt. Charles W. Dunning, who was soon replaced by 1st Lt. Francis E. Brenner.

Until it transferred to March Field, near Riverside, California, in June of 1941, the 51st PG was a "paper organization" with no aircraft and few personnel. It then received both, the former consisting mainly of Curtiss P-40s. Its squadrons trained at a number of different air bases in southern California — including, in the 26th's case, besides March, Naval Air Station North Island in San Diego and Mines Field near Los Angeles — and provided part of the area's air defense after Japan's 7 December attack on Hawaii. The Group reunited at



This flight jacket patch for the 51st Fighter Group was locally produced in Burma.



Some 26th FS pilots at Kunming "scramble" to their planes, a mixture of P-40Ks and Ns that have yet to receive the squadron's colorful new markings, other than their yellow nose bands.