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'CLOBBER' COLLEGE

by William G. Robertie



Unlike its counterparts back in the States 'Clobber' College was not founded along conventional lines. It was never intended to endure and resist the ravages of time, nor was its name included in the carefully pruned list of American Colleges and Universities.

'Clobber' College was unique in three ways. The curriculum did not include courses of study you could carry over into civilian life, it was intended to be short

lived (and was) and its graduates excelled in their chosen profession — without exception.

Instead of cloistered walks and Gothic buildings 'Clobber' College's campus consisted of Nissen-hutted farmlands sprouting crude hangars, revetments, runways, perimeter tracks, P-51 Mustangs and P-47 Thunderbolts. Entrants at 'Clobber' College, the undergraduates, were freshly arrived fighter pilots who had weathered a rigid 'high schooling' in the States.

The College, for all its rustic tranquility, was a vast improvement over what had been done earlier. Previous to its founding all untried pilots arriving in England were shunted to one of two combat replacement centers where they underwent several weeks more training before being assigned to a fighter unit. Here, from the outset, they were expected to duplicate the feats of the veteran pilots. The 'Clobber' College for those who had to travel this route was their first ten missions. If they survived they had a fighting chance to see it through to the end of the war, but all too many did not survive and their loss was a waste. There *had* to be a better way.

With the advent of the 'College' theory such newly arrived pilots were sent directly to an operational group which trained them for battle in the surroundings of a station engaged in sending planes over enemy territory on a daily, and sometimes hourly, basis. All such stations thus became a part of 'Clobber' College. In this setting, new and exciting to the neophytes, an intensive course of ground and flying classes was offered.

Conducting their training in this manner made it possible to include the Eighth's most expert fighter pilots as 'Deans' and 'Faculty' members — young veterans who helped to pioneer the way and who had the eagle and leaf hardware to prove it.

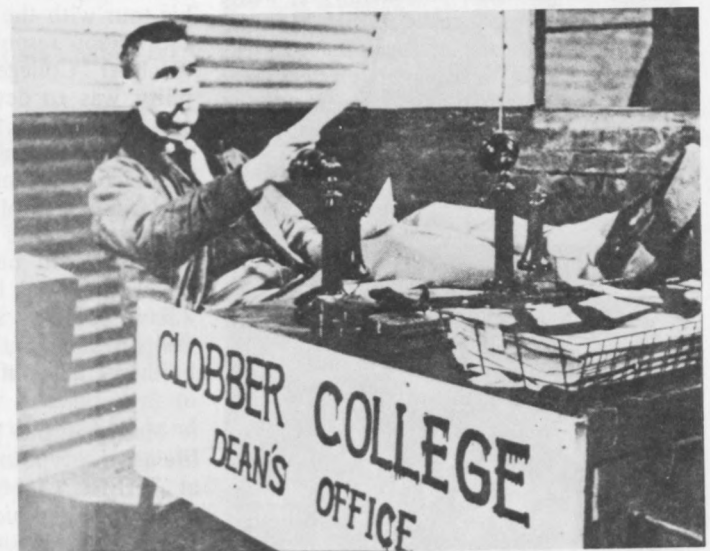
In this atmosphere the new arrival immediately developed a feeling of 'belonging'. He lived and ate with veteran combat pilots, and a mutual feeling of respect developed that was essential to successful combat.

At the officer's club, following a mission, the newcomer felt

that he was one of the group as experienced pilots described their aerial bouts over Berlin, Merseburg or Dresden, and soon the student was asking: "How many planes did WE destroy today?" or "What is OUR group score now?"

The battle tested boys often got quite a kick out of watching the 'Clobber Kids' try to adopt the mannerisms of experienced pilots — walking, talking and wearing their clothes like many of the vets. A "bird dog's" first drink with a veteran at the officer's bar was always an occasion. But, contrary to popular belief, some of those 'bird dogs' could out-do the veterans when it came to 'bending-an-elbow'. Flying wasn't the ONLY thing they learned back in the States!

One by one the 'Dean' and 'Faculty' members took the 'bird dogs' under their wing and showed them how to fly a Mustang. Having been previously trained in P-40s, a forgiving airplane, the youngsters were naturally nervous when they were checked out in P-51s. The 'Dean' usually climbed into the control tower and conducted his course by two way radio which carried a constant stream of chatter from tower to plane and back.



Dean Major Richard A. Peterson checks records of new 'student'. Nothing like being informal!!!

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