

# AVIATOR ADVENTURERS



This page: Barrington Irving posing by his plane. Opposite: Glacier Girl, the celebrated P-38 that is part of the legendary Lost Squadron buried beneath 256 feet of Greenland ice cap, exposed.

## Barrington Irving

### The Kid Flies to Inspire

Jamaica-born Barrington Irving is the first person of African descent and the youngest pilot ever to fly solo 26,800 miles around the globe. He is all of 23. Still, the white-hot fire to achieve that blazes within the Florida Memorial University senior, who grew up in inner-city Miami, a clerk in his parents' Christian bookstore, is outwardly contained. "I consider myself a person who followed his passion," he says, simply.

Barrington's fireball of yearning was ignited at age 15 when a bookstore customer – a Jamaican airline pilot – invited the future adventurer to visit the cockpit of his United Airlines Boeing 777. That was it. In short order he had his private, commercial, instrument and flight instructor ratings. His transformation was astounding. From inner-city kid who shared a sense of hopelessness about his future (and believed a football scholarship the only ticket to success) to full-fledged aviator, launched into a world vastly larger and more

exciting than he ever thought possible.

He dreamed of a round-the-world flight – impossible for he had no plane. Not until he convinced aircraft parts manufacturers to donate just one of whatever they made until he had in his possession every last bolt required to assemble the phenomenal 400 the Columbia Aircraft corporation agreed to build for him. Next news from the boy wonder? He had taken off, his heading the aviation record books.

"After earning my first pilot's license I had the greatest feeling ever," he says. "I did not want to wait until I was 40 (to convince) other youths to experience the way aviation can touch your life because I'm not sure if I would have made it past 21 or even 25 in my neighborhood." He adds: "I wanted to fly around the world to show kids that I did it, and it didn't matter where I came from. If I had one opportunity to make a significant impact" I would show them: "There is a better alternative to the negative influences on the street."

For more information on Barrington, visit [experienceaviation.org](http://experienceaviation.org)

## Pat Epps

### The Aviator Finds his Glacier Girl

Only one man had the tenacity – some say insanity – to search for, dig up and eventually recover Glacier Girl, the celebrated P-38 that is part of the legendary Lost Squadron buried beneath 256 feet of Greenland ice cap. "I was stuck to the project like Brer Rabbit got stuck to Tar Baby," says the 73-year-old adventurer, who lives in Athens, Georgia.

Digging up the grave of Glacier Girl "was thought daring, foolhardy," says the founder of Epps Air Service of Dekalb-Peachtree Airport (PDK). His recovery team's efforts – relentless, difficult, exhausting efforts – were an ordeal that battled dangerously unpredictable Arctic weather and endless lack of financial resources that year after year threatened to doom the project. But this was an expedition that fit Epps perfectly. "Lindbergh, Ernie Gann, Bob Hoover, Doolittle...it's the guys ahead of us who paved the way that gave us confidence," Epps says of the aviation greats he calls his heroes, men who inspired his quest. "Others have had success, so why shouldn't we?"

In the 11th year, it happened: the expedition's "Super Gopher" steam probe, plunged 250 below polar ice, made contact: a B-17. Though this craft proved to be too badly crushed to retrieve, further exploration located the soon to be celebrated P-38, all in one piece. This plane today after 10 years of painstaking restoration serves as arguably the most authentic – and flyable – P-38 in the world.

"It ain't all luck," says Epps of his success at one of aviation's greatest search-and-recover missions. "A lot of it was, but mostly it was preparation." His daughter, Elaine Persons, begs to differ. Her father is the living, flying embodiment of the words of Norman Vaughan, the explorer who accompanied Admiral Byrd to the South Pole. "You haven't failed until you quit," is what Vaughan would say," she says. Says her tenacious father: "My nature? Nothing unusual. I'm just curious. I always want to see what's on the other side of the river."

Get wind of Epps' latest aviation exploits at [eppsaviation.com](http://eppsaviation.com)



## Dave Riggs The Wild Child Courts G's

"I have nothing against team sports, but let's face it, air to air combat above the desert in a military jet kinda beats golf," says Dave Riggs, 45. His website, wildchildjet.com, says it: The man who in 2005 made aviation history as the first pilot to set three FAI World Speed Records (piston-powered Class 1b at 312.12 mph; rotorcraft Class 2b at 120.65 mph; and jet Class 3e at 561 mph) lives for "the feeling of freedom and the thrill of the adrenaline rush."

"I consider life an adventure and every day a potential challenge," he says. "I have proved to myself I have, dare I say? the right stuff."

Dare away. First a private, multi-engine, instrument and helicopter pilot and then: owner of a former Soviet light attack fighter trainer, the L-39 – a plane capable of .84 Mach and speeds approaching 450 knots. "What a joy to fly!" he says. I always could "see myself pulling g's and dogfighting my way to Acehood!" But seriously. "Pushing the envelope in life means taking risks and seeking the rewards associated with those risks," he says.

Talk about intense! He refers to training to fly his L-39. "Energy management, combat reversals, transonic buffet, mach tuck, high g climbs, bomb delivery descents, loops, snap rolls...AGGGHHHH. Was I ever going to get this stuff right?" he recalls. "My friends and family thought I was crazy to be screaming around in a plane like this," he says. One crazy day the screaming was timed. He and pilot Jeffrey Acord flew from Los Angeles to Phoenix in 39 minutes, 58 seconds – a record.

"It's my life as a middle-aged fighter pilot," laughs Riggs. "For me, flight is about enjoying it, and a record is about planning and precision, to get a speed record you have to do everything right. And that is fun to try."

Catch up with (if you can) the Wild Child himself at wildchildjet.com



## Bud Judy The Loop-Lover Flirts with Flawless Flight



Over 70 years old and the three-time U.S. National Aerobatic Champion, and boredom drove him to it. For 41.5 years Louis "Bud" Judy was Captain Louis "Bud" Judy, a Delta Airlines pilot who upon retirement in 1994 got "the chance to feel the fun of flying again" in competitive aerobatics. So long boredom, hello adventure. Neither the thrill of danger nor the thrall of daring nor the need for speed or adrenaline fix puts Judy, who lives in Granbury, Texas, into the cockpit of his self-built monoplane, the *Judy Monosport*. What then? "It's about challenging myself, being the best I can be. What I do is more like gymnastics or springboard diving. Airshow pilots, hell, they're the real flirts with the thrills of danger," he says.

For the former Air National Guard fighter pilot, it is not about the win, though Judy does plenty of it. "Just to know you had a nice, clean flight..." well, give him that over trophies or accolades or the quest for broken records. The aerobatic contests in which the rolling-looping-spinning maneuvers Judy pulls off in a 1,000 meter cube of airspace weaken the knees of pilots half his age but leave competitor Judy exhilarated – and challenged. Lately the champ has put himself up against aerobatic flyers in the Advanced divi-

sion – much to his ability to laugh. "I got *trounced* by those kids," he chuckles of one recent contest. "You'd think they'd have some sympathy!" Will he compete against them again? Yes. He adds: "I like to do things off the cuff, which you might consider adventurous. But really, what might seem thrilling or dangerous to some, doesn't seem so to me. It's all about flying that one, flawless flight."

Follow Judy's U.S. Aerobatic Competition performance at [usnationalaerobatics.org](http://usnationalaerobatics.org) 

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