

The Flying T

Their combat run was only seven months, but that was enough to establish their legend.

Ten Japanese bombers, twin-engine Kawasaki Ki-48s, took off from the Gia Lam airfield near Hanoi on the morning of Dec. 20, 1941. Their target was Kunming in southwestern China, the capital of Yunnan Province and the eastern terminus of the Burma Road.

The Japanese did not know—and would not have cared if they had known—that the surveillance and warning network had spotted them and relayed the word to Kunming. They had bombed Kunming and Chungking regularly for more than a year without opposition.

This time, it would be different. For the previous two days, two squadrons of fighter aircraft had been stationed at Kunming—Curtiss P-40s with 12-pointed Chinese stars on their wings and red-and-white shark's teeth markings around their air scoops.

The bombers were circling around to strike the city from the far side when they were intercepted by four P-40s. The Japanese jettisoned their bombs and fled. They did not get far before they were caught by more of the fighters, which ripped through the formation and shot down three bombers. The others broke away, but one of them was trailing smoke. It exploded before reaching the Indochina border.

The shark-mouthed P-40s were the fabled Flying Tigers on their first combat mission. However, they were not yet

By John T. Correll

known as the Flying Tigers. That name, bestowed on them back in the United States, came later. They referred to themselves as the American Volunteer Group, or AVG.

The P-40s returned to the field and one of them did a victory roll. They were met on the ground by their leather-faced leader, Claire L. Chennault. "It was a good job, but not good enough," he said. "Next time, get them all."

The mayor of Kunming and hundreds of citizens thronged to the airfield in a procession to heap honor and thanks on the AVG. There would be more encounters with the Japanese Air Force, but not over Kunming. "Japanese airmen never again tried to bomb Kunming while the AVG defended it," Chennault said.

The AVG, pilots and ground crews alike, were former members of the US armed forces, recruited to fight on contract for the Chinese Air Force, which had been effectively blown out of the sky by the Japanese. Chennault, who had retired from the Army Air Corps as a captain in 1937, had no military rank, even though the Chinese called him "colonel." His passport said he was a farmer. (See "Flying Tiger, Hidden Dragon," March 2002, p. 72.)

The Flying Tigers existed as a combat unit for only seven months. They never had more than 50 combat ready aircraft at a time, and never more than 70 pilots ready to fly. They faced an enemy force



that was 20 times larger with better airplanes. They were chronically short of parts and supplies. Nevertheless, they shot down at least 10 Japanese airplanes for every one they lost, and they held the line in China until the regular Army Air Forces could get there.

The AVG's combat run was brief, but it was long enough to establish the legend. The Flying Tigers are one of the most famous and admired organizations in all of military history. No fighting airplane is more quickly recognized than the P-40 with the shark's teeth and the glaring eye.

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Top: Maj. Edmund Goss. Seated: (l-r) Lt. Col. John Alison and Lt. Roger Pryor. Standing (l-r): Lt. Joe Griffin, Lt. Mack Mitchell, Capt. John Hampshire, and Capt. Hollis Blackstone. They notched 10 confirmed kills on April 28, 1943.

Chennault Goes to China

China had been at war since 1931, when the Japanese seized Manchuria. (See “Before the Flying Tigers,” June 1999, p. 72.) The Chinese had struggled to build an air force without success, employing a succession of ineffective foreign advisors and mercenaries. The pilot training cadre, furnished by the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, awarded wings automatically, regardless of qualifications, to the sons of Chinese politicians.

Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, leader of the Nationalist Chinese, ap-

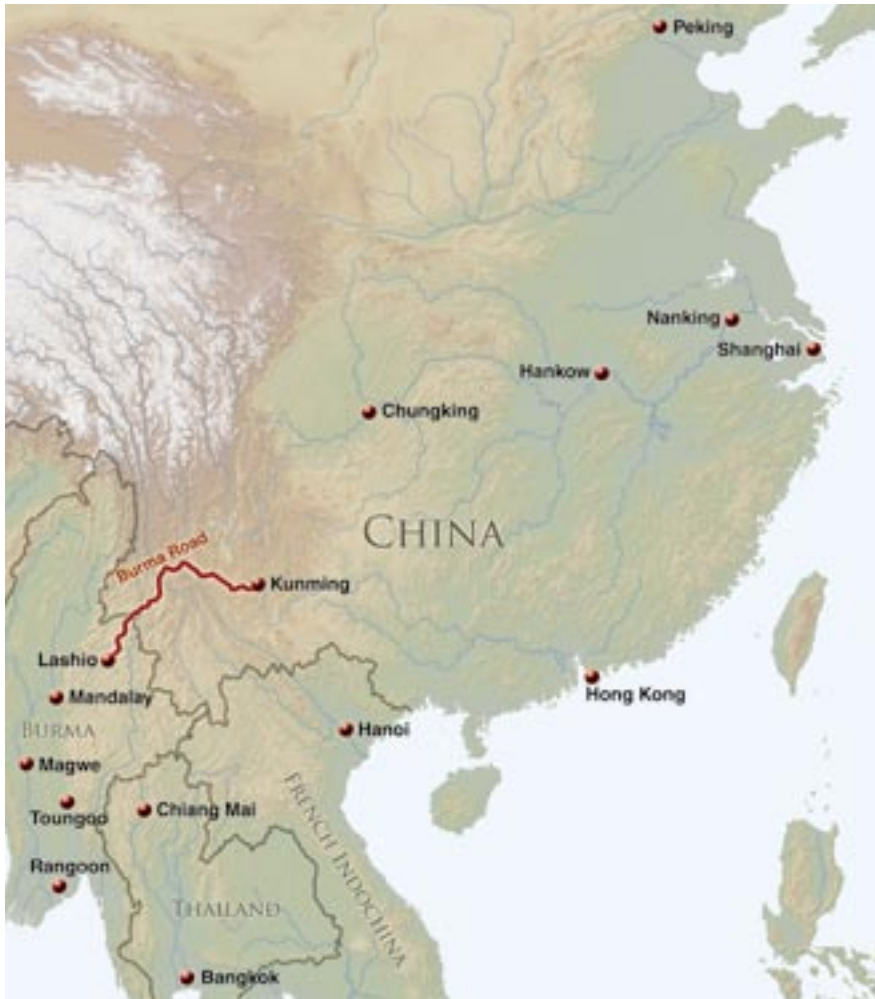
pointed his wife, the formidable Madame Chiang, to head China’s Aeronautical Commission, clean out graft, and reorganize the air force. On the advice of one of her competent counselors, she hired Claire Chennault of Waterproof, La., to conduct a three-month survey of the Chinese Air Force.

Chennault was an excellent pilot, a good tactician, and a superb leader, but “abrasive” was one of the milder terms used to describe him. He was a fierce champion of pursuit aircraft, as fighters were then called, and he was never on good terms with his Air

Corps colleagues, who thought the future belonged to the bomber. “Who is this damned fellow Chennault?” asked an up-and-coming lieutenant colonel named Henry H. “Hap” Arnold.

Chennault arrived in China in May 1937. He would stay, in one capacity or another, until he left to retire as a major general in 1945, still at loggerheads with the Army. He got along well with both the Generalissimo and Madame Chiang, who had been educated in Georgia and Massachusetts and who spoke English with a Southern accent.

“I reckon you and I will get along



Japanese forces held eastern China, including the coastline, and the Nationalist government held out in Kunming. Without access to Chinese ports, Chiang Kai-shek relied on the Burma Road, and hired American volunteers to guard it.

Himalayas to Kunming, 700 miles away on the eastern side of the mountains. To get over the high passes, trucks had to negotiate several miles of grueling hairpin turns for every mile of forward progress they made. There were two suspension bridges, across the Salween and Mekong River gorges.

The AVG

In 1940, the Chinese decided to try a different approach to protect the Burma Road and defend their cities. They would hire 100 American pilots and buy 100 of the best American airplanes they could get. The generalissimo sent his brother-in-law, the Harvard-educated T.V. Soong, to Washington, D.C., to make the arrangements. A few months later, Chennault was dispatched to help him.

They proposed to recruit from the ranks of Army, Navy, and Marine Corps pilots. That idea was flatly rejected by Hap Arnold, by then a major general and Chief of the Air Corps, and by his Navy counterpart, who felt they had no pilots to spare. The request to purchase airplanes was turned down as well.

However, the “China Lobby,” which had considerable strength in Washington, appealed the decision to President Roosevelt, who ordered that the airplanes be made available and that the pilots be released by the services. This did not improve Chennault’s reputation with the War Department.

all right in building up your air force,” Chennault drawled.

“I reckon so, Colonel,” she drawled back.

In July 1937, soon after Chennault’s arrival, the Japanese launched a major offensive. Peking, Shanghai, and Nanking fell to the invaders. As the Nationalists fell back to their wartime capital at Chungking, Chennault stayed on to help with training and air defense.

The problems of the Chinese Air Force went deep, and the continued use of international mercenaries was no solution. Some of them were proficient but most, Chennault said, “subsisted almost entirely on high-octane beverages.”

The Japanese held eastern China, including the coastline. Without access to the Chinese ports, Chiang Kai-shek relied on the Burma Road as his principal lifeline. Munitions and war materiel went north from Rangoon to the railhead at Lashio, where the Burma Road began. Built by the Chinese with hand labor, the Burma Road crossed the



Claire Chennault is shown here as a major general. For his time with the Flying Tigers, he had no official rank and was usually called “colonel.”

The Curtiss-Wright aircraft plant in Buffalo, N.Y., diverted production of 100 Tomahawk II fighters, export versions of the P-40 originally intended for the British, to China. Although first-line Air Corps squadrons flew the P-40, it was regarded as obsolete. It was built for low-altitude combat and lacked the agility and climbing speed to match the best fighters of the day, the British Spitfire and the Japanese Zero.

On the other hand, the P-40 was rugged and had qualities of its own, such as diving speed and firepower. It had two .50-caliber machine guns on the nose, firing through the propeller arc, and four .30-caliber guns, two on the leading edge of each wing. The Tomahawks obtained for the AVG were essentially equivalent to Air Corps P-40Bs. (See "A Family of Hawks," p. 41.)

The AVG signed up 109 pilots and 186 support personnel who sailed for China in the summer of 1941. Most of the pilots were paid \$600 a month—double or triple their military pay—plus a bonus of \$500 for every Japanese airplane they destroyed. Ground crew members got \$150 to \$350 a month, with some line and crew chiefs later raised to \$400.

Before the AVG could go into action, the aircraft had to be assembled and the crews trained. The first aircraft were delivered in crates to Rangoon in May 1941. There were no spare parts, not even extra spark plugs. Shortage of parts was a problem that was never solved completely.

The AVG was activated Aug. 1 with a



Photo by R.T. Smith via David Hill

With their distinctive shark-mouth paint schemes, these P-40s are instantly recognizable as Flying Tiger aircraft. The Americans defeated their adversaries by a margin of at least 10-to-one.

training base at Kyedaw airfield outside of Toungoo, 175 miles north of Rangoon. There were three squadrons with whimsical names. The First Pursuit Squadron was the "Adam and Eves" because Eve chasing Adam was the first pursuit. The second squadron, with a nod to the host country, was the "Panda Bears." The third squadron, "Hell's Angels," was named after a 1930 Howard Hughes movie about World War I aviators.

The AVG had no military ranks, but Chennault regularly spoke of "officers" and "enlisted men," and there were two mess halls, one for pilots and staff and the

other for technicians. "No salutes were required," Chennault said. "If somebody cared to salute me, I always returned it." His signature block was simply "C.L. Chennault, commanding."

It was during the training period in Burma that the AVG adopted its famous trademark, the shark's teeth. The design was not original with the AVG. It was copied from pictures in *Illustrated London News* of RAF Tomahawks in Egypt. The RAF had copied it from Me-110s of the 76th Luftwaffe Group.

Every day at Toungoo, Chennault lectured on tactics he devised to reduce the advantages of the Japanese fighters and emphasize the P-40's strengths.

"You can count on a higher top speed, faster dive, and superior firepower," he said. The Japanese fighters "have a faster rate of climb, higher ceiling, and better maneuverability. They can turn on a dime and climb almost straight up. If they can get you into a turning combat, they are deadly.

"Use your speed and diving power to make a pass, shoot, and break away. You have the edge in that type of combat. All your advantages are brought to bear on the Japanese deficiencies. Close your range, fire, and dive away. ... Make every bullet count. Never try to get all the Japanese in one pass. Hit hard, break clean, and get in position for another pass."

(Many stories about the AVG tell of fights with the Japanese Zero. In actuality, the Flying Tigers never faced the Mitsubishi A6M Zero. By December 1941, it had been withdrawn from China



Pictured (l-r) are Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, Madame Chiang, and Claire Chennault. Madame Chiang, a shrewd political operator, was instrumental in bringing Chennault to China.



US Army Lt. Gen. Joseph Stilwell (r), shown here with Chinese Army Gen. Liao Yao-Hsiang, was in 1942 named commander of US forces in the China-Burma-India Theater. "Vinegar Joe" was an infantry officer with a strong prejudice against airpower. He immediately set about the task of taking over Chennault's Flying Tigers.

for employment elsewhere in the Pacific. The AVG's opponents were the Japanese Army's Nakajima Ki-43 Oscar, which strongly resembled the Navy's Zero, and the Nakajima Ki-27 Nate. According to Flying Tiger communications tech Robert M. Smith, "The AVG called all Japanese fighter planes Zeros."

Chennault had another advantage with an air raid warning system that he described as "a vast spider net of people, radios, telephones, and telegraph lines that covered all of Free China accessible to enemy aircraft."

To War

In the days following the Dec. 7 attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese struck all over Asia. When Hong Kong fell, Chiang Kai-shek lost his last air route to the China coast. The Japanese seized bases in Thailand, notably at Chiang Mai in northern Thailand, from which they could more easily threaten the Burma Road. They invaded Burma Dec. 11.

Chennault had not quite finished the AVG training but decided he had to deploy from Toungoo anyway. He sent one squadron to join the RAF in the defense of Rangoon and took two squadrons to Kunming, which became his primary base of operations.

The Japanese bombers from Gia Lam struck Kunming Dec. 18 and encountered no resistance. The AVG airmen, arriving later that day, saw the smoke from the bombing. By dawn on Dec. 19, the AVG had 34 Tomahawks ready to fight at Kunming.

On Dec. 20, the bombers returned

and the AVG shot down four of them. That engagement marked not only the combat debut of the AVG but the first defeat in battle for the Japanese Army Air Force.

Back in Washington, the AVG's State-side administrative and support arm at the Chinese Embassy hit upon "Flying Tigers" as a nickname for the AVG. Contrary to a recurring story, the name had nothing to do with the teeth on the aircraft, which were in any case shark's teeth. The name was first used by *Time* magazine Dec. 29, 1941, in an article entitled, "Blood for the Tigers."

The AVG pilots learned with surprise from press reports that they were the "Flying Tigers," but they warmed to the name and kept it. Walt Disney studios designed a Flying Tiger insignia. It had a Bengal tiger with wings leaping through a V-for-Victory device.

Three days after the AVG chased the bombers away from Kunming, the Battle of Rangoon began and it was a major event. "Although the AVG was blooded over China, it was the air battles over Rangoon that stamped the hallmark on its fame as the Flying Tigers," Chennault said. For the next 10 weeks, he rotated his three squadrons between Rangoon and Kunming.

Opposing the invasion of Burma was a hodgepodge of ground forces led by the British and a handful of RAF and AVG aircraft. Dispute continues about the statistics from this action, but RAF Air Vice Marshal Donald F. Stevenson, Allied air commander in Burma, estimated that the Allies destroyed 291 Japanese

aircraft in the Burma campaign. He attributed 217 of those to the AVG.

The P-40 was an excellent airplane for the Battle of Rangoon, which was mostly fought below 20,000 feet. At that altitude, the P-40 was the best airplane in the fight, and it was the best armed.

"The victories of these Americans over the rice paddies of Burma are comparable in character if not in scope with those won by the RAF over the hop fields of Kent in the Battle of Britain," said British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. In August 1943, the British awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for defense of Burma to AVG pilots David L. "Tex" Hill, Edward F. Rector, Charles R. Bond Jr., and (posthumously) John V. Newkirk.

Holding the Line

The valiant effort was not enough to beat the overwhelming Japanese strength. Rangoon fell March 8. The invaders surged northward, capturing Lashio and pushing the Chinese army backward along the Burma Road. The Japanese had 14 air regiments, between 400 and 500 aircraft, in Burma, China, and Thailand.

By early May, the Japanese were inside China, on the western side of the Salween River gorge. The retreating Chinese Army had blown up the bridge, even though some of their own forces had not yet gotten across.

"There were no obstacles between the Japanese and Kunming but a broken bridge and the AVG," Chennault said. "If the Japanese got to Kunming, it meant the end of the war for China."

Closure of the Burma Road and Japanese capture of Kunming would have left China with only one remaining supply route, through Turkestan and Mongolia from Russia. Transports could fly over the Hump of the Himalayas from India into Kunming, but they did not have the range to reach Chungking.

The replacement aircraft, delivered to the Flying Tigers in March, were critical to what happened at the Salween gorge. They were P-40Es, with bomb racks, which gave the AVG its first capability for bombing.

For four days, Chennault threw everything the AVG had against the Japanese, attacking them from the Salween River all the way back to the Burma border. It was enough. "By May 11, the only military traffic along the Burma Road was moving south toward Burma," Chennault said.

To better defend Chungking and deter bombing raids, Chennault deployed two of his squadrons to eastern China. They headed off air raids, dive-bombed enemy airfields and bases, and took a definite toll on the Japanese forces.

"The group had whipped the Japanese Air Force in more than 50 air battles without a single defeat," Chennault said. "With the RAF, it kept the port of Rangoon and the Burma Road open for two-and-a-half precious months while supplies trickled into China."

The AVG had "saved China from final collapse on the Salween," he said. "Its reputation alone was sufficient to keep Japanese bombers away from Chungking. It freed the cities of east China from years of terror bombing."

Top guns for the AVG were Robert Neale with 15.55 victory credits and Tex Hill with 11.25. (See "Tex," July 2002, p. 81.)

Stilwell and Bissell

The China-Burma-India Theater was set up in December 1941, and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek was named Supreme Allied Commander for China.

Almost immediately, the US War Department began maneuvering to induct the AVG into the regular US Army. The Army was willing to recall Chennault to active duty but not as its top commander in China.

That job went to Joseph W. Stilwell, "Vinegar Joe," a friend and protégé of Gen. George C. Marshall, the Army Chief of Staff. In March 1942, Stilwell was promoted to lieutenant general and

named commander of US forces in the CBI Theater.

Stilwell was an infantry officer with a strong prejudice against airpower in a theater that was largely about airpower. Diplomacy was not among his skills. He spoke Chinese but did little to hide his condescending attitude toward the Chinese people. He held Chiang in contempt and called him "Peanut." (Stilwell referred to Roosevelt, who was confined to a wheelchair, as "Rubber legs.")

When Allied forces were in retreat from Burma, Stilwell refused to board an airplane sent to fly him out. Instead, he chose to walk out to India and led a ground party of 118 through the jungles to India. The ranking American officer in Asia was out of touch with the rest of his command for two weeks.

When the AVG was merged into the Army Air Forces, Chennault, at Chiang's request, would be the senior air commander in China, but Col. Clayton L. Bissell, was named to head American Air Forces in the CBI. He, rather than Chennault, was Stilwell's air deputy. Bissell had been junior to Chennault when both of them were in the Air Corps, and Chennault had a low opinion of Bissell.

Chennault was called to active duty, promoted to colonel, and then to brigadier general. However, at Stilwell's insistence—with the full support of Marshall and Arnold—Bissell was promoted to the same grades one day earlier than Chennault at each turn.

Their intent was to ensure that Chennault would be subordinate to Bissell at all times. Their antipathy

deepened later when Roosevelt met Chennault, liked him, listened to his advice, and invited direct correspondence from him.

Stilwell persisted in his disdain for airpower. In a famous exchange reported by *Time* magazine, Stilwell told Chennault that "it's the man in the trenches that will win the war." Chennault shot back, "Goddamn it, Stilwell, there aren't any men in the trenches."

End of the AVG

Few of the AVG pilots were enthusiastic about being inducted into the Army Air Forces in China. They preferred to fly out their contracts and go home. Even so, most of them eventually returned to US military service. Two of them went on to earn the Medal of Honor. The AAF could have recruited more of them than it did in China in 1942, had the offer been made with greater consideration and respect.

Bissell, in a radiogram to the War Department, described the AVG pilots as a "wild, undisciplined lot." Indeed, the Flying Tigers were often boisterous and unruly. Their critics emphasized that aspect of the AVG but gave short shrift to the fighting abilities of the airmen and their contributions in plugging the gap against the Japanese in the first days of the war.

According to Chennault, more of the AVG veterans would have joined the AAF if they could have gotten a furlough before resuming combat and if the Army had been willing to offer them regular commissions.

Instead, Bissell gathered the AVG force at Kunming and issued a threat. "For any of you who don't join the Army, I can guarantee to have your draft boards waiting for you when you step down a gangplank onto United States soil," he said.

After that, only five pilots and 22 of the ground personnel chose to join the AAF. Service with the AVG did not count for promotion, retirement, or time in grade. The Flying Tigers did not share in the generous promotions awarded elsewhere for those with prewar military service.

Dissolution of the AVG was set for July 4, 1942, but the US Army was not ready. "Fifty-five AVG pilots and ground crew men who were unwilling to see the air defense of China collapse completely when the Army was unable to provide either planes or personnel by July 4 ... volunteered to remain in combat for two extra weeks," Chennault



Chennault (c) confers in Kunming with Col. Robert Scott Jr. (l), later to become author of *God Is My Co-Pilot*, and Brig. Gen. Clayton Bissell. Chennault had a low opinion of Bissell, whom Stilwell picked as his air deputy.

A Family of Hawks

The Curtiss P-40, called the Warhawk in US service, was the principal fighter of the Army Air Corps at the beginning of World War II. More than 14,000 were produced in different models and variants. The P-40 was flown by 28 nations, but it is forever associated in popular memory with the American Volunteer Group Flying Tigers. (See "Airpower Classics: P-40 Warhawk," March, p. 88.)

The P-40 evolved from the trusty Curtiss P-36 Hawk, to which it bears a strong resemblance, but the P-40 had a liquid-cooled Allison engine in place of the radial air-cooled engine of the P-36.

British variants were known as Tomahawks (equivalent to P-40Bs and P-40Cs) and Kittyhawks (equivalent to the P-40E and later models).

There is some confusion about which model the AVG initially flew. The airplanes were Tomahawks, diverted from an order for the British, but were they Tomahawk IIs (equivalent to P-40Bs) or Tomahawk IIBs (equivalent to P-40Cs)? Chennault, in his autobiography, *Way of a Fighter* (1949), called them P-40Bs, but many books and articles say they were P-40Cs.

The facts seem to be these. Curtiss sold the airplanes as H-81A3s, which would have been Tomahawk IIBs, or P-40Cs. However, AVG pilot Erik Shilling said emphatically that the features of the aircraft received were those of the Tomahawk II, including externally sealed fuel tanks. In other words, P-40Bs. It appears that Curtiss had some leftover parts in stock and decided to use them on the AVG order. The airplanes were essentially P-40Bs.

AVG replacement aircraft, which began arriving in March 1942, were Kittyhawks, or P-40Es. Unlike the P-40Bs, the Kittyhawks could carry bombs. They also had a larger radiator, so the air scoop moved forward, giving the shark face a stronger "chin." All told, the AVG got about 30 P-40Es.

said. Two of them were killed on these volunteer missions.

The China Air Task Force, commanded by Chennault, took over when the AVG was disbanded. It inherited the AVG's mission and assets, which included 31 Tomahawks (P-40Bs) and 20 Kittyhawks (P-40Es). Of these hard-used aircraft, 29 were flyable. The fighter element of the CATF was the 23rd Fighter Group. (The official designation changed from "pursuit" to "fighter" in May 1942.)

In March 1943, the China Air Task Force became Fourteenth Air Force, which picked up the Flying Tiger name and tradition and established its own reputation for effectiveness. Lt. Gen. Hiroshi Takahashi, chief of staff of Japan's Northern China Area Army, attested to its achievements.

"Considering all the difficulties my armies encountered in China, including guerrillas, ground armies, lack of supply, difficult terrain, noncooperation of the Chinese, I judge the operations of the Fourteenth Air Force to have constituted between 60 percent and 75 percent of our effective opposition in China," Takahashi said. "Without the air force, we could have gone anywhere we wished."

However, the soap opera was not quite over. In 1944, Stilwell was recalled from China at the request of Chiang Kai-shek. Marshall and Arnold, believing that Chennault had a hand in Stilwell's difficulties, replaced him as commander of Fourteenth Air Force and forced him into retirement.

On his way back to the United States,

Chennault made a farewell call in Chungking. People from the countryside flocked to the city and mobbed the car in which he was riding. The driver turned off the engine and the crowd pushed the car through streets and up hills to the open square where thousands had gathered for the leave-taking ceremony.

Chennault retired Oct. 31, 1945 as a two-star general.

Legacy and Legend

As more information about World War II becomes available, parts of the Flying Tiger story have been re-examined with results that are hotly disputed. Between December 1941 and July 1942, according to AVG and Air Force records, the Flying Tigers destroyed 299 Japanese aircraft while losing only 12 of their P-40s in combat.

Those numbers are challenged by Daniel Ford, who did extensive research of Japanese Air Force losses, down to accounting for specific airplanes and crews, and interviewed veterans of Japanese units. In *Flying Tigers*, published by the Smithsonian Institution Press in 1991, he concluded that there had been multiple claims on many of the specific credits and that Japanese losses did not exceed 120 aircraft.

AVG veterans and supporters accused Ford of getting it wrong, but Robert Neale, commander of the Flying Tigers

1st Pursuit Squadron and leading ace of the AVG, called the book "a very well-documented history of the AVG with great attention to detail." Some recent books and articles accept Ford's numbers. Others do not.

Animosity toward the Flying Tigers is still found, notably among academicians. For example, a strange commentary, posted on the Air University Web site, discounts the AVG as a "much-storied group of mercenaries turned heroes" and says that "Chennault's strategic ideas can only be classified as puerile."

On the other hand, the US government in 1991 at long last recognized the achievements of the Flying Tigers with the award of a Presidential Unit Citation for operations from Dec. 7, 1941 through July 18, 1942. The citation said that the AVG was "a major factor in defeating the enemy invasion of South China."

Through it all, the legend of the Flying Tigers survives. In the months following Pearl Harbor, they were the only effective Allied air force operating on the Asian mainland. Flying airplanes that were regarded as obsolete and hampered by irregular supply of parts and support, they consistently outflew and outfought the Japanese air regiments, which had better airplanes and were present in far superior numbers. Even if the revised numbers are accepted, they defeated their adversaries by a 10-to-one margin.

They provided both relief and hope for Chinese cities, which had not previously had much of either. They ended Japan's uncontested bombing raids, stopped some of the attacks and deterred others, and blocked the advance of the Japanese into China.

In 1957, Chennault was one of 29 airpower notables recognized at the AFA National Convention for their contributions to history. Today, AFA annually presents the Lt. Gen. Claire L. Chennault Award to the Air Force's best aerial warfare tactician of the year.

Chennault died July 27, 1958, nine days after Congress promoted him to lieutenant general. No doubt he would have been pleased to know that, almost 50 years after his death, the Air Force was carrying on the Flying Tigers legacy as A-10s of the 23rd Fighter Group, emblazoned with the distinctive shark's teeth markings, flew combat missions in Afghanistan. ■

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