

Chapter 1 : The Flying Tigers

The First American Volunteer Group (AVG) of the Chinese Air Force in , nicknamed the Flying Tigers, was composed of pilots from the United States Army Air Corps (USAAC), Navy (USN), and Marine Corps (USMC), recruited under presidential authority and commanded by Claire Lee Chennault.

The nickname was bestowed by the grateful Chinese after the American pilots attacked a large number of Japanese fighters over Kunming on December 20, 1941. In just seven months of intense aerial combat, the AVG earned a lasting niche in aviation history, reportedly destroying nearly 300 Japanese aircraft for the loss of only 69 planes. Equally famous is their brilliant and controversial commander, Claire L. Chennault, whose genius for leadership in the face of overwhelming odds made him a hero in the United States as well as in China. Chennault was a unique individual who could inspire great accomplishments from all those who served under him. In creating his legendary group of airmen—composed of former U. Navy, Marine and Army Air Corps pilots who quietly entered China posing as artists and missionaries—Chennault established his own version of an ideal mercenary band. Their shoulders held the sky suspended: What God abandoned these defended and saved the sum of things for pay. The battle for China officially began in 1941, when a resource-depleted Japan took advantage of an opportunity to invade Manchuria. Torn by many years of civil war and battles between warlords, the Chinese found it beyond their power to halt the Japanese aggression, which escalated in the following years. The carnage continued as the Japanese swept nearly unopposed across the fertile agricultural plains of eastern China. Peking and Shanghai quickly succumbed during ruthless attacks on strategic military targets and civilian population centers. Chennault, who was born in and grew up in Louisiana, had tried unsuccessfully to become a pilot during World War I. The war ended before he had his wings, but he spent the postwar years honing his skills as an aerobatic flier and working on aerial maneuvers, especially the use of three-plane teams. Williams, flew Boeing P biplanes. The peppy little aircraft were equipped with hp engines and could achieve a top speed of mph. Claire Chennault and Sgt. The two outside pilots, McDonald and Williams, would clamber out of their aircraft, each carrying a foot length of rope. Then they hopped back into their cockpits, waved to the crowd and took off once more. The team members, literally linked together by the two thick ropes, performed a number of slow, lazy loops above the fascinated crowds. Their most spectacular stunt, however, was a complete degree roll maneuver. It was an absolutely breathtaking display. By 1941, Chennault had served 20 years in the U. Partially deaf from many years of open-cockpit flying, he retired and the aerobatics team was disbanded. But in the audience at their last. Chennault accepted the challenge and the rank of colonel in the Chinese Nationalist air force. In the following months, he worked hard to organize and educate the eager young Chinese pilots who wanted to join in the defense of their country. But due to political pressure and a lack of planes, he was forced to send many of the flight cadets back to the United States to complete their training. Between 1941 and 1942, the Chinese military establishment was made up of many regional military elements, considered the personal armies of powerful and wealthy land barons. This situation led to bickering over leadership, disorganization in planning and ineffective distribution of scarce resources. Roosevelt to support a clandestine foreign aid program to China. As it happened, Roosevelt was already looking for a way to aid China in her struggle against the Japanese. A band of recruiters, including some retired U. Navy commanders, combed Army, Navy and Marine bases looking for volunteers with a sense of adventure and some aviation experience. In exchange for signing a one-year contract, they were told that when their time was up they could go back to their old ranks. But according to some AVG pilots, Generalissimo Chiang was a bit slow in signing those bonus checks for the confirmed kills. Most of the American volunteers who sailed for the Far East in the summer and fall of 1941 were young and relatively inexperienced. Altogether, 87 pilots and some ground support personnel joined Chennault at a training base in Burma, where they familiarized themselves with the PB and began exhaustive tactical instruction. When Chennault had accepted the Ps from the Curtiss Wright factory, the only place to load them on board a ship was at a New York City pier. As the first crated fuselage was being hoisted aboard the ship, the cable snapped and the fuselage complete with engine, radios and all cockpit gauges—fell into the Hudson River. The crate was recovered, but

the engine and gauges were waterlogged and determined a loss. Now there were only 99 planes left. After the men, equipment and Ps reached the assembly area, Chennault divided the aircraft into three AVG squadrons. By that time, three of the volunteers had died in training accidents. Their mission was to protect the Burma Road, a vital mile-long supply line that ran through rugged terrain between Lashio and Kunming. Putting their team tactics to the test day after day over cities and hamlets with tongue-twisting names such as Lungling, Poashan, Kunming, Kweilin, Yunanyi and Chanyi, they racked up impressive victories over Japanese forces. Their deeds quickly assumed legendary proportions in the American press as well as in other nations. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, not a man for idle praise, cabled the governor of Burma in No, not radar, but a communications matrix that stretched across the entire face of Yunan province [which is considerably larger than the state of Texas]. They all worked fine. Some were even battery operated. The batteries, known as A, B1, B2 and C types, were hard to come by. It took all three types of batteries to run one of those radios. Most of our select radios were military type field phones. They were connected to our plotting center at the Kunming AVG Headquarters by miles and miles of two-strand military communications wire. These remote outposts were secret. Thus the aircraft identification net was formed. The net was ineffective. We caught 21 of these wire cutting thieves over a period of time and executed them all. Yet the wire was still being stolen. He said not to worry, he would take care of the matter. A few mornings later the governor called me, and I went with him and my interpreter, P. Que, to a nearby hamlet. As we got closer to the village, I noticed that there was a man hung by the neck, swaying from a pole at the village entrance. The village lost face for 50 years. You know, from that day on we never lost another inch of wire! The unwritten law was to make do with what you had on hand, or do without. The unpredictable Chinese weather was another factor that frequently halted AVG offensive missions. Little did any of us realize what we had gotten ourselves into! I also helped construct other clandestine emergency airfields and installed our weather forecasting equipment. They just needed to relay the number of planes sighted, their location and their direction of flight. Back at headquarters in Kunming, John would plot the courses on a wall map. Then he would order the Ps up to engage them. Because of our radio alert network, we saved many thousands of gallons of aviation fuel. It must have driven them crazy! Schramm, of Cumberland, Pa. Looking back over his AVG experiences years later, Schramm recalled the events of one memorable mission on Christmas Day We knew the Japanese were going to bomb the city and the roads would be choked with refugees trying to flee the onslaught. He was an ace in just one day! You know, that plane was built like a semitruck. It could take a lot of punishment. Not much went wrong with it, either. I recall I cut off all the brass buttons from my uniforms to prevent any association with the U. We all had phony American passports. Our occupations were [listed] as carpenter, sheet metal worker, musician, electrician, stonemason, etc. However, it had heavy armor plating to protect the pilot, and when fully armed and loaded with aviation gas, it took 20 minutes to climb to 20,000 feet. The P had two. So a pilot had to learn and play it smart-had to know when to dive, how fast, pick out a target, and when to pull the trigger to engage those six teethrattling machine guns. National Archives Chennault had drilled his pilots relentlessly. It was rugged, and it would usually get you back home no matter how badly it was damaged. It also had superior diving ability. More than 40 years after the war, Hill recalled his first combat victory: We received our briefing, and four of us left Rangoon to strafe an airfield location called Tak. One P developed some sort of engine problem and returned to Rangoon. Three of us went on. It was then that I noticed there were too many of us in formation. Somehow, a Jap Zero swooped in and got on the tail of the P in front of me. I pulled the trigger, fired my machine guns and shot the Zero down. He put 33 bullet holes in my P fuselage before I could break away.

Chapter 2 : History of the Flying Tigers

It tells the story of how, Claire Chennault, the commander of the Flying Tigers, shaped a hard-drinking, brawling bunch of inexperienced airmen into a fighting unit with a war record second to none. We are pleased to announce a Collector's Edition of this definitive documentary is now available on DVD.

Origin[edit] Chennault in his Kunming office, May Chennault , a retired U. Army Air Corps officer who had worked in China since August , first as military aviation advisor to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek in the early months of the Sino-Japanese War , then as director of a Chinese Air Force flight school centered in Kunming. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union supplied fighter and bomber squadrons to China, but these units were mostly withdrawn by the summer of The resulting clandestine operation was organized in large part by Lauchlin Currie , a young economist in the White House, and by Roosevelt intimate Thomas G. Purchases were then made by the Chinese under the " Cash and Carry " provision of the Neutrality Act of Members were organized into the Yankee Squadron. Chennault spent the winter of 1941 in Washington, supervising the purchase of Curtiss P fighters and the recruiting of pilots and some ground crew and administrative personnel that would constitute the 1st AVG. He also laid the groundwork for a follow-on bomber group and a second fighter group , though these would be aborted after the Pearl Harbor attack. One army pilot was refused a passport because he had earlier flown as a mercenary in Spain, so only 99 actually sailed for Asia. Although sometimes considered a mercenary unit, the AVG was closely associated with the U. Most histories of the Flying Tigers say that on 15 April , President Roosevelt signed a "secret executive order " authorizing servicemen on active duty to resign in order to join the AVG. Army chain of command. During the summer and fall , some men carrying civilian passports boarded ships destined for Burma. Chennault set up a schoolhouse that was made necessary because many pilots had "lied about their flying experience, claiming pursuit experience when they had flown only bombers and sometimes much less powerful aeroplanes. Most believed that he had flown as a fighter pilot in China, although stories that he was a combat ace are probably apocryphal. All 9 were trained at Allison Engineworks in Indianapolis, Indiana: Upon arrival in Kunming, 2 other Chinese-Americans were hired, a Ford Motor truck specialist and a doctor. Total original Chinese-Americans were Prior to July 4, 1942, 3 of the P mechanics resigned. The official AVG roster lists the original 8. He did not speak English, however, and Chennault never learned to speak Chinese. The actual average strength of the AVG was never more than 62 combat-ready pilots and fighters. Chennault faced serious obstacles since many AVG pilots were inexperienced and a few quit at the first opportunity. However, he made a virtue out of these disadvantages, shifting unsuitable pilots to staff jobs and always ensuring that he had a squadron or two in reserve. The AVG had no ranks , so no division between officers and enlisted soldiers existed. He prohibited his pilots from entering into a turning fight with the nimble Japanese fighters, telling them to execute a diving or slashing attack and to dive away to set up for another attack. This "dive-and-zoom" technique was contrary to what the men had learned in U. The P aircraft were crated and sent to Burma on third country freighters during spring Many of those were destroyed in training accidents. Shortages in equipment with spare parts almost impossible to obtain in Burma along with the slow introduction of replacement fighter aircraft were continual impediments although the AVG did receive 50 replacement PE fighters from USAAF stocks toward the end of its combat tour. AVG fighter aircraft were painted with a large shark face on the front of the aircraft. This was done after pilots saw a photograph of a P of No. Please help improve this article by adding citations to reliable sources. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed. December Learn how and when to remove this template message The port of Rangoon in Burma and the Burma Road leading from there to China were of crucial importance. Eastern China was under Japanese occupation, so all military supplies for China arrived via the Burma route. By November , when the pilots were trained and most of the Ps had arrived in Asia, the Flying Tigers were divided into three squadrons: When the United States officially entered the war, the AVG had 82 pilots and 79 aircraft, although not all were combat-ready. Tiger Erik Shilling, part of the third squadron commented:. The bombers jettisoned their loads before reaching Kunming. Three of the Japanese bombers were shot down near

Kunming and a fourth was damaged so severely that it crashed before returning to its airfield at Hanoi. Later, Chinese intelligence intercepted Japanese communications indicating that only 1 out of the 10 bombers ultimately returned to base. One P crash-landed; it was salvaged for parts. This mission was one of the earliest American aerial victories in the Pacific War. The Chinese characters read, "This foreign person has come to China to help in the war effort. Soldiers and civilians, one and all, should rescue and protect him. Baldwin Collection The first squadron had flown up to Kunming to defend the terminus of the Burma Road and saw some combat action on 20 December while defending Rangoon from Japanese bombers, taking down four of them and disrupting their attack on Burma Road. The 3rd Squadron "18 aircraft strong" defended Rangoon from 23-25 December. On 23 December, Mitsubishi Ki "Sally" heavy bombers of the 60th, 62nd and 98th Sentai, along with single-engined Mitsubishi Ki "Ann" attack bombers of the 31st Sentai, sortied against Rangoon. They were escorted by Nakajima Ki "Nate" fighters of 77th Sentai. The 60th Sentai was particularly hard hit "it lost five out of the 15 bombers it had dispatched. Nevertheless, Rangoon and Mingaladon airfield were successfully bombed, with the city suffering more than 1, dead. Two Buffalos and two Ps were destroyed on the ground, and one P crashed when it attempted to land on a bomb-damaged runway. A total of 63 bombers escorted by 25 fighters were committed. In the two encounters, 35 Japanese bombers and fighters were shot down. The Allies lost two pilots and five Ps. The Japanese had moved aircraft to Malaya to finish off Singapore, and its remaining aircraft in the area the 77th, 31st and 62nd Sentai launched fighter sweeps and counter raids on the Allied airfield at Mingaladon. On 12 January, the Japanese launched their Burma Campaign. Significantly outnumbered, the AVG was gradually reduced through attrition, but often exacted a disproportionate toll of their attackers. Three "Nates" were shot down for the loss of two Ps. The next day, another sweep of 20 Kis of the 70th Sentai was met by 10 Allied fighters eight Ps and two Hawker Hurricanes. Four were shot down for the loss of no Allied aircraft. Commonwealth troops retreated before the Japanese onslaught, and the AVG was pressed into the ground attack role to support them. One unfortunate result of these missions was a prolonged air attack on a suspected Japanese column on 21 February that turned out to consist of Commonwealth troops. More than Allied lives were lost in this friendly fire incident. By 24 January, the Flying Tigers had destroyed 73 Japanese aircraft while losing only five themselves "a notable performance, considering the AVG was outnumbered and faced experienced and fully trained Japanese pilots. The main disadvantage of JAAF fighter pilots of this period was the near-obsolescence of their predominant fighter type in the theater, the Ki Though more maneuverable than the P, its armament and performance was inferior. Lightly constructed and armed, it could not withstand frontal attacks nor could it out-dive Allied fighters such as the P; if it attempted to, it often came apart in the air. In fact, its cruising speed was less than that of the Ki bombers it was intended to escort. Chennault started moving elements of the now reconstituted 3rd Squadron to Magwe as reinforcement to his worn down 1st and 2nd squadrons. Aircraft attrition became so high that at this point, individual squadron distinctions became meaningless, and all three squadrons had elements based there, along with a number of RAF aircraft. In total, the Allies had 38 aircraft, including eight Ps and 15 Hawker Hurricanes. Opposing them were Japanese aircraft, including fighters. The Tigers crossed into China on a rickety suspension bridge over a deep gorge. A few months later, they came back to destroy the bridge so no Japanese soldiers could come across that way into China. Despite the long retreats, their losses and incessant air combat, the AVG still retained their abilities. That day, 12 Oscars from the 64th Sentai raided the base. In the ensuing series of dogfights, four Kis were downed in exchange for one PE destroyed on the ground. During this period, Chinese and American commanders pressured Chennault to order his pilots to undertake so-called "morale missions". These were overflights and ground attacks intended to raise the morale of hard-pressed Chinese soldiers by showing they were getting air support. Chennault suppressed the "revolt" and ordered the ground attack missions to continue. But despite their efforts, the Allied situation in Burma continued to deteriorate. By 4 May, the successful Japanese Burma offensive was winding down, except for mopping up actions. One of these was an attempt by a regiment of the Japanese 56th Division to drive for Kunming, an effort that was stopped by the Chinese army operating with strong air support from the AVG. On 7 May the Japanese Army began building a pontoon bridge across the upper Salween River, which would allow them to move troops and supplies into

China and drive towards Kunming. During the next four days, the AVG pilots flew continuous missions into the gorge, effectively neutralizing the Japanese forces. This prevented a Japanese advance on Kunming and Chungking; the Japanese never advanced farther than the west bank of the upper Salween. With the Burma campaign over, Chennault redeployed his squadrons to provide air protection for China. The Doolittle Raid had prompted the Japanese to launch an offensive to seize AVG air bases that could be used for attacks on the Japanese homeland. Despite its location in areas with malaria and cholera, it had only "four doctors, three nurses and a bottle of iodine. A squadron had 45 maintenance personnel compared to the normal more than , and only one base could perform major repairs. He notes that its pilots were "triple volunteers" who had volunteered for service with the U. The result was a corps of experienced and skilled volunteer pilots who wanted to fight. Allen "Bert" Christman, who bailed out at Rangoon, was strafed and killed while parachuting to the ground in January, had earlier scripted and drawn the Scorchy Smith and Sandman comic strips. See also List of Flying Tigers pilots, which includes their victories and bonuses paid. Nineteen pilots were credited by the AVG with five or more air-to-air victories:

Chapter 3 : BOOK REVIEW: 'The Flying Tigers' by Sam Kleiner - Washington Times

"THE FLYING TIGERS: The Untold Story of the American Pilots Who Waged a Secret War Against Japan Before Pearl Harbor" is a well-written, comprehensive account of one of the most unique fighter units of the Second World War.

Chennault a former U. Army Air Corps fighter pilot who resigned his commission in to offer his services to China in its war with Japan , President Roosevelt and various members of his Administration. Army Air Force fighter and bomber units arrived in China to continue the fight against Japan , the Flying Tigers established, against great odds, an outstanding combat record in fighting Japan in both China and Burma. This book also presents photos some never before seen in any previous AVG history and fascinating, heart-warming personal stories of the pilots and personnel of the AVG - including a nurse, Emma Foster, and a special, enduring relationship she developed with one of the AVG pilots - which make the Flying Tigers story more tangible and real to the reader. I was one of those people. I had always thought that these group of men fought for China against Japan as Japan was working at taking over China and other countries before attacking us. True that the leader of the group Claire L. Chennault was wanting to fight against them and China he did not have the resources to that. You get a look at the behind the scenes of yes This story is more about the history that gets lost and retold by the movies and over time that is what people are led to believe. You get a look at the behind the scenes of yes back door deals done with F. The author uses diaries, notes, some interviews, and documents that have been unsealed for a full look at this look into what the established military wanted people not to know about including their excellent combat record. I did like how the author takes a look at the different pilots and maintenance crews, and especially the store with a nurse named Emma Foster. Overall I found this to be a very good book and something interesting about the war in the Pacific that had not been told before. A good piece of writing and well researched. I received this book from Netgalley. Follow us at www. I have heard of the Flying Tigers for many years but know so little about them until I got a hold of this book. What prompted to read this book was the result of reading a previous book on China and America titled The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom. That book talked about the Flying Tigers and their commander Claire Chennault and although i This is the story of a military aviation volunteer group comprising mostly of Americans that fought against the Japanese in China during the s. That book talked about the Flying Tigers and their commander Claire Chennault and although it was too brief the reference to the Flying Tigers that book made me want to find a longer discussion of the famous fighter outfit. I love the book for its description of the various colorful characters in the outfit and in history during that time; but it was also insightful of other historical figures such as the Nationalists president Chiang Kai-shek and his famous wife. Readers will enjoy the stories of the AVG being undersupplied, undermanned and fighting against all odds to be an operational combat group. I also enjoyed the stories of various pilots first encounter with the Japanese in combat and the various other battles that followed. The book tells readers of the various accomplishments of the Flying Tigers. Readers will also learn of the politics of the regular Army Air Force marginalizing the Flying Tigers and how the men and leader of the Flying Tigers not appreciating this. What a small world! Overall I enjoyed this book and recommend it!

Great to be at the Flying Tigers Association reunion in Dallas last month. I got to share my passion for telling the Tigers' story: "I think as a country, we don't do a good enough job of preserving and taking an interest in so much of our history."

The direction of the rest of my life was based on the earning of my Navy wings. After graduating from St. After one term of hitchhiking from San Francisco to San Mateo each school day approximately twenty miles down the bay then hitchhiking back to downtown San Francisco where I had a job, then going home to study, I decided it was not practical. My best bet, I figured was to work full time for awhile and save enough money to have a nest egg for college. In , in the middle of The Depression, I started pounding the pavement looking for a full time job. In April I finally landed a job in the Merchant Marines and spent my 19th birthday at sea off the coast of Central America. It was very difficult to get a job aboard ship in those days but once you were in the union, it was relatively easy to go from one steamship line to another. For most of the next five years I was able to travel the world, taking off enough time to complete four semesters at the University of California at Berkeley. Since I was taking electrical engineering, I automatically was assigned to the Signal Corps. I used to see the notices on the R. I was underweight and our family doctor told me I could never pass the physical. One of those unforeseen but fortunate circumstances happened in late as I was sailing on the S. President Garfield on an around-the-world trip coincidentally, the same ship on which Claire Chennault sailed to China one year before , I became acquainted with a Navy captain and a Navy commander on their way back to New York from Manila. I mentioned to them how I would like to go to Pensacola. When we docked in New York I was pleasantly surprised when each of these officers gave me a letter of recommendation. Back in San Francisco in early I had managed to put on about ten pounds, but I was still underweight. I submitted my application to the Navy, along with the two letters of recommendation. Not being very optimistic about my chances, I applied to Pan American Airways for a job as purser on their Clippers. August arrived and I had heard nothing, so I went over to Berkeley and signed up for the fall term. Just before school was to start, I received a notice from the Navy to report to Oakland Reserve Base for a physical. The mail also brought a notice to report to Pan American on Treasure Island. I set my priorities. I would try first for Pensacola; if that did not work out, I would go to Pan Am; failing that I would go back to school. I reported for my Navy physical and, although still underweight, I was given an N. However, I was ordered to report to the dispensary after every meal to drink an ounce of cod liver oil. I took a lot of ribbing from the other aspiring cadets about that. Our Elimination Training started in September. Our class reported to Pensacola the last week of December and we started our flight training in January as class C. After getting my commission and wings, I was ordered to the newly opened Saufley Field as an instructor at Squadron 1-C. We were required to resign our commissions due to the covert nature of the job and the relations with Japan. The contract was for one year with assurance that we could return to the Navy in our old slot with no loss of seniority. The Pearl Harbor attack would alter the future plans of all the volunteers in our group. We were told that we would be a fighter group flying Ps and that our mission would be to protect the Burma Road; that we would be followed by a bomber group and then another fighter group. Our group was named the First American Volunteer Group. I have been asked many times why I volunteered. There are several reasons, here are some: I had been instructing at Pensacola for over a year and I wanted to get into flying fighters; I felt that it would further my career in the Navy to go out to China and fly for the one year of the contract; the pay they offered was good; it seemed like a good thing to do for the US and China; and the adventure of it appealed to me. In San Francisco the Pensacola contingent of eighteen pilots was joined by more Navy and Army pilots plus some ground support personnel. Most of the FAVG had already departed which made our group the last contingent of pilots to arrive in Rangoon. Several additional ground support people arrived on a later ship. Boschfontein, arriving in Rangoon on 12 November. That afternoon we boarded the train for Toungoo, Burma, which was to be our temporary training base. With our arrival, the FAVG was essentially complete except for the half dozen support people behind us. We arrived in Toungoo, about miles north of Rangoon, at Some of the volunteers who had arrived before us came down from the base to meet us. We all saw some people whom we knew, but had no idea they had joined the

AVG also. Those who arrived before my group had already been formed into a headquarters section and three pursuit squadrons. Pursuit was the Army designation at that time for what the Navy called fighter squadrons. We were immediately assigned to one of these units. I was assigned to the 1st Pursuit Squadron. Having been raised in an Italian ancestry family of ten children I thought I was pretty used to chaos. I later realized that we had been fairly well organized in comparison to some outfits I later joined. Things in Toungoo did not run too smoothly. Since our group of pilots on the Boschfontein were the last to arrive, we were way behind the first arrivals. They had already had months of lectures from Chennault and many hours of indoctrination in the P, plus gunnery, formation and dogfighting practice. Many things had happened before our arrival including a couple of fatal accidents, resignations, and various training accidents, resulting in the loss of quite a few of our Ps. The first few of our group to get P flight time managed to have a couple more accidents. Unfortunately the SNJ was out of commission so our checkouts were delayed. More than a week passed before I was able to get a couple of hops in the SNJ and then try my hand in the P. Our P cockpit checkout and instructions came from an ex-Navy pilot, Edgar Goyette. After almost a year instructing in N3Ns, the P was quite an experience. One of my main motivations for joining the AVG was to get into combat-type planes. The P definitely fulfilled that desire. It required full attention to keep it under control. Many of our Navy types thought these would perform better than the P Tomahawks. Chennault thought differently and so arranged for the RAF to send up a pilot in a Buffalo to have a dogfight with one of our Ps. Erik Shilling flew our Tomahawk and soundly defeated the Buffalo. That was a morale booster for us. It was an instantaneous hit with our whole group and within days all our planes were adorned with it. It fit the P perfectly. I was able to get about ten hours in the P and was really getting to enjoy it when we were hit with a slowdown in our flight time. With a few exceptions, all the pilots from the Boschfontein were put on hold and the flight time was being given to the earlier arrivals. I got a lot of duty and loafing time for the next ten days. Each of the three squadrons had its own alert tent on the field. There was a lot of grumbling from those not getting any flying time. Our whole group was now getting ready to make the move to Kunming, China, which was to be our main headquarters base. Several truck convoys had started up the Burma Road. Most of our ammunition was in the convoy which turned out to be unfortunate. On Monday morning, 8 December, we were on the other side of the international date line as we were showing up at the flight line, first came rumors and then confirmation of the attack on Pearl Harbor. We were both shocked and excited. We were aware of the danger of a Japanese attack on the United States, but it was a big surprise that the first U. Now our presence had a much bigger purpose. We would be fighting directly for the United States as well as our allies. We all seemed to get more serious and intense. There had been Japanese observation planes over our Toungoo base several times, so we were expecting immediate action. With only part of our planes in commission, a shortage of ammunition since most of it was in transit over the Burma Road, and planes being prepared for the trip to China, we were in a vulnerable situation. Chennault immediately ordered a couple of planes to fly patrol over the field. The other planes ready to go were warmed up periodically so that takeoff would not be delayed. That night we instigated a blackout which was kept up for the duration of our stay. News was very limited and all we heard about were allied disasters. The Japanese taking of Thailand meant we were only one hundred miles from enemy fields. Pearl Harbor had now made our move into China from Toungoo uncertain. We were hoping for some good news to come out. We were issued gas masks and steel helmets and everyone wore their sidearms. At night, six pilots were on alert. Barbed wire was going up everywhere, slit trenches were dug in case of a bombing, the place was a beehive of activity. There was an alert about on 10 December and the six night standby planes took off. It was a false alarm and unfortunately, one of our planes crashed on landing in the dark, but the pilot got out okay. The same day we received the news of Pearl Harbor I started to get more P time.

Chapter 5 : Dick Rossi's Story | Flying Tigers AVG

The Flying Tigers marks the debut of an incredibly talented new historian and is a must-read not only for World War II aficionados but for anyone who likes a good story. It is full of them." It is full of them."

As a result, these volunteer pilots were required to resign their commissions with the US military, travel to China as civilians and enlist in the Chinese Air Force. After their first combat on December 18, 1941, where they were highly outnumbered and very successful, a journalist wrote in his column, "they flew like tigers. This is the story from which legends are made. History of the American Volunteer Group by RT Smith Japan had attacked China in the late 1930s, and by the end of 1941 had captured vast land areas of China as well as her seaports. Millions of Chinese, both military and civilian, had been slaughtered by the Japanese Army and its Air force. The Chinese Air force, with its handful of obsolete planes and poorly-trained pilots, was never a match for the Japanese and by 1941 had nearly ceased to exist. That the Chinese were able to put up even token resistance in the air was due to the fact that Chiang Kai-shek had hired a retired Air Corps Captain names Claire Chennault as his Air Force advisor. Chennault, a former Air Corps pursuit pilot, had been retired due to partial deafness, but was considered by many of his peers to be a master tactician. Once in china, he discovered a situation that seemed hopeless, but immediately took steps to improve training and obtain planes that could compete with the Japanese. For a number of reasons, and through no fault of his own, his efforts met with little success. By the end of 1941 it appeared that China would inevitably lose the struggle. With Japan controlling the seaports and blockading the entire coast, vital military supplies could no longer be brought in from countries friendly to her cause, including the United States. The only lifeline for supply that remained was the Burma Road, a tortuous unpaved passage hacked through the most rugged mountainous terrain in the world and stretching for hundreds of miles from northern Burma to Kunming in southwestern China. From the seaport of Rangoon, supplies could be shipped by rail to northern Burma, then transferred to trucks for the perilous journey on to Kunming. And now even that critical lifeline was threatened with the Japanese moving unopposed into Indo-China and establishing air bases from which their bombers could attack the truck convoys on the Burma road itself. This was the situation when, in early 1942, Chennault and a handful of prominent Chinese officials visited Washington D. C. Government to discuss what could be done to keep china from falling to the Japanese. The plan that evolved called for the purchase by the China Defense Supplies Agency of modern fighter planes from the United States. To fly the planes, military pilots now on active duty with the US Navy, Air Corps or Marine Corps would be allowed to resign their commissions in order to volunteer to fly and fight on behalf of China. Another two hundred volunteers from the enlisted ranks would be recruited and hired as ground-support personnel; crew-chiefs, armorers, propeller specialists, communications, administrative and medical staff. This group would be called the First American Volunteer Group, and it was hoped that other groups, including bombers, would follow. Since the United States was not at war with anybody at that time, many feared that such plan would provoke the Japanese unnecessarily. Others felt it might be the last hope for saving China. Fortunately for China, the plan received the blessing of then-President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the wheels were set in motion. The British would instead receive later-model PE "Kittyhawks" with improved armament and performance. A company called Central Aircraft Manufacturing Corporation CAMCO was set up with offices in New York city to handle procurement and administrative duties in addition to recruiting the necessary personnel. In the late springs and early summer of 1942 four or five recruiters, all former military men well-known to Chennault, visited Army Air Corps, Navy and Marine Corps air bases. Pilots and ground personnel were gathered in separate groups and briefed on the plan. The primary mission would be defense of the Burma Road, the duty would be hazardous, and inevitably there would be casualties. RT glanced off to the side, put his tongue in his cheek, and said: They soon learned, however, that not nearly enough pilots with those qualifications were ready to volunteer for such an assignment. The same proved to be the case, perhaps to a lesser degree, from among the enlisted ranks. In any case, the recruiters were forced to lower their sights a good deal, and by mid-summer of 1942 had signed up a hundred pilots whose experience, with some exceptions, was a far cry from what was originally planned. My own case was not atypical: I had never

flown a fighter plane, had received no gunnery training of any kind, and indeed had never even seen a P So just who were these guys? Well, we wound up with about fifty former Navy pilots, about thirty-five ex Air Corps, and about fifteen from the Marines. Of these numbers, about one out of three had had any significant training and experience in fighter planes and aerial gunnery. The rest were the damndest assortment you can imagine; from the Navy, former pilots of dive-bombers, torpedo-bombers and flying boats. For sure, this was not a bunch that anyone in their right mind would have labeled "Flying Tigers. In the event the pilot is shot down, this advised natives that this pilot was an American fighting for China. And why did we volunteer for such dangerous duty when we could have remained safe and comfortable in a peacetime military environment? Obviously, there is no one answer to such a question. A very few may have been enticed by a bigger paycheck, but not many would willingly stick their necks out to that extent simply for a few extra dollars. Many of us, at least to a degree, were idealists who knew we would be fighting for a just cause. Most wanted to prove to themselves that they had both the courage and ability to engage an enemy in battle and beat him. Some felt they were in a rut, dissatisfied with their military assignments in the US, wanting to be fighter pilots instead of being restricted to the limited horizons of flying bombers or training planes. So there were a number of reasons, and I believe that a combination of these prompted most of us to sign up with the AVG. There was one other reason, however, that was common to us all, and that was a strong thirst for adventure in faraway places. While we might be regarded as Soldiers of Fortune or Mercenaries by others, in our own minds we were simply adventurers. This above all else made us a very close-knit group, pilots and ground personnel alike, and engendered a spirit that was to sustain us through the many difficult and dangerous months ahead. All of us were to become familiar with what it meant to be on a slow boat to China, although our first destination was to be Rangoon, Burma. We traveled in manageable groups on four or five different ships embarking from San Francisco throughout the summer of The trip took from five to seven weeks time with three or four stops along the way. The first contingent arrived about the first of September and immediately set about assembling the Ps that had been shipped to Rangoon in huge crates. The last contingent arrived in mid-November at the little used air strip that the British RAF had loaned to us for use as a training base. This base was near Toungoo, Burma, about miles north of Rangoon. Chennault and his small staff organized the group into three pursuit squadrons, each to have 33 planes and pilots, and a severely limited number of ground crew personnel to service and maintain them. The plan was to train the group in Burma until it had become an efficient and capable fighting unit, then move to what would be our main base of operations in Kunming, China, by the end of the year. There were many accidents, a dozen or so planes wrecked beyond repair, and three pilots killed. Add to this the primitive and rugged living conditions that prevailed, and you can almost understand why several pilots and ground crewmen resigned and headed back to the States by the end of November. There was no way to hold them, the contract they signed being unenforceable, and for that matter, Chennault was glad to weed out the malcontents before going into battle. Our group went on full alert immediately, of course, spurred by reports that the Japanese were moving into neighboring Thailand. A week or so later the other two squadrons were moved to Kunming, and just a couple of days after their arrival they engaged in the first combat action of the AVG. Elements of the 1st and 2nd squadrons engaged a force of IO twin-engined Japanese bombers enroute to their target, Kunming. Six of the bombers were shot down, and the others severely damaged as they high-tailed it back toward their base in Indo-China. According to later reports, only one of the bombers made it back safely. This action took place on December 20th, , less than two weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor. We met them with 14 Ps, all we had available, and in the two encounters, shot down a total of 35 Jap bombers and fighters, damaged many more, with a loss of five Ps and two pilots. This, my friends, was the ultimate in on-the-job training! What followed from that point on throughout Burma and China until July of has been well-documented, and I believe our record speaks for itself. And very early in the game the Chinese people, and the press, began referring to us as the Flying Tigers. Our victories over the Japanese during those early weeks and months after Pearl Harbor were among the few things that the United States could be proud of or boast about. We were hailed as heroes even more by the Chinese people than the press, and of course we loved every minute of it. What had started as a rag-tag bunch of wild adventurers had turned into a dedicated and efficient fighting machine. Some of

those in the US Government, particularly in the military, who had predicted that we would not last three weeks in combat were forced to eat their words. Chennault, unheard of except by a handful of people, was suddenly acclaimed as a genius for his tactical abilities. He was justifiably proud, of course, but was always the first to agree that it was his Flying Tigers - the AVG, pilots and ground personnel alike - that made him famous, not the other way around. It was in the spring of that Roy Williams of the Walt Disney Studios in Hollywood designed what was to become our group insignia. It consisted of a winged-tiger flying through a large V for Victory. It was both unique and beautiful, and we loved it. In due time, we received a supply of large decals of this insignia and many of us applied them to the side of the fuselage of our planes. We knew that the US would eventually have to send military units, most likely in the form of several fighter and bomber squadrons, to come to the aid of China. The reasoning, of course, was that an organization of so-called "civilians" such as the AVG could not co-exist with military organizations. This was probably true, but it was equally true that the US had neither the manpower nor equipment readily available to supplant our efforts immediately. So it was decided that the AVG would continue to function as originally intended until July 4, , at which time the first contingents of US Air Corps planes and personnel would take over. Pilots and ground personnel of the AVG were offered the option of being inducted, with suitable rank, into the Air Corps on July 4th or returning to the United States. By this time, after six months of constant combat, we were pretty well exhausted, both mentally and physically, and needed a rest. Twenty-two of our pilots had paid with their lives, either in accidents or in combat. Three more had been shot down in enemy territory and were now prisoners of war. One of our crew-chiefs had been killed in a bombing attack on one of our little airstrips in Burma. We had lost many planes and received only a handful of replacements, practically no spare parts. By July we were down to about twenty war-weary planes capable of combat, and perhaps twice that number of relatively healthy pilots. We all felt that it was high time the US Military should step in with fresh planes and pilots and the resources to back them up properly. Only five pilots decided to accept commissions and remain, along with a couple of dozen ground personnel who agreed to being inducted. The rest of us would be free to leave early in July and return to the States as best we could. The Air corps showed its "appreciation" by refusing to provide air transportation beyond a point in northeastern India despite the fact that there was space available on many a transport plane of the Ferry Command heading toward the middle-east, Africa and eventually the United States. As a result, most of us were forced to make the long and hazardous journey by boat and at our own expense.

Chapter 6 : The Flying Tigers of World War II - HISTORY

The immediate successors to the Flying Tigers was an Air Corps unit called the China Air Task Force (CATF), which had been part of the 10th Air force with headquarters in India. The CATF included the 23rd fighter Group, composed of three squadrons of PEs, and a squadron of B bombers.

Chapter 7 : About the Film " Fei Hu: The Story of The Flying Tigers

Author explores untold stories of Tacoma's 'Pappy' Boyington in Flying Tigers book "The Flying Tigers really inspired the country that we could fight and win this war," Kleiner said.

Chapter 8 : Fei Hu: The Story of The Flying Tigers

The Flying Tigers: the untold story of the American pilots who waged a secret war against Japan. [Samuel M Kleiner] -- "The thrilling story behind the American pilots who were secretly recruited to defend the nation's desperate Chinese allies before Pearl Harbor and ended up on the front lines of the war against the.

Chapter 9 : American Volunteer Group: Claire L. Chennault and the Flying Tigers | HistoryNet

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This is dedicated to information about the founders of the Flying Tiger Line and the History from Vern Moldrem has graciously allowed us to use references from his comprehensive Book "Tiger Tales" to supplement the stories.