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PROPOSAL FOR A DRAMATIC MOTION PICTURE
BASED ON EXPLOITS OF THE FLYING TIGERS –
THE AMERICAN VOLUNTEER GROUP

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I.

PROLOGUE

A. Introductory/Historical Note to the Prologue

“It would be a nice thing if China bombed Japan.” These were the words uttered by President Roosevelt to Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr. before a luncheon at the Whitehouse on December 8, 1940, one year before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. His guests were Dr. and Mrs. T. V. Soong (Dr. Soong being China’s Foreign Minister) and Mr. And Mrs. Morgenthau. In November of 1940, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek had dispatched a secret telegram to President Roosevelt asking for a “special air unit” composed of five hundred planes as well as American pilots and technicians to fly and maintain the aircraft. One hundred and fifty planes were to be bombers that would firebomb

Japanese cities from secret air bases in Eastern China. Chiang Kai-shek and Soong's request for a "special air unit" was given serious consideration at the highest levels of the American Government in December of 1940, only one year before the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor.

Exactly one year after the luncheon, on December 8, 1941, President Roosevelt would tell the world that America "was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan." He would further relate: "The United States was at peace with that nation and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with its government and its Emperor, looking towards the maintenance of peace in the Pacific." The world's "historical memory" about the origins of American involvement in World War Two is formed by the words uttered by President Roosevelt during his address before Congress on the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Accordingly, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor tells only half the story of aggression, deception, and intrigue between the Japanese and American governments in the closing months of 1941. Little is known or has been written about the formation of a "volunteer" (American) air force formed in secret by Roosevelt's cabinet members and military

officers during the year before the Pearl Harbor attack. Even less is known about America's plan to engage in a "preemptive strike" by deploying American bombers in China (that would operate, ostensibly as part of the Chinese Air Force) that would bomb Japan.

In the fall of 1940, Claire Chennault, a retired Army Air Corps captain was visiting Washington. Chennault was in service to Generalissimo and Madame Chiang Kai-shek as a "technical adviser" to the Chinese Air Force which was in shambles. As a mercenary pilot flying in China, Chennault had witnessed the devastation inflicted on Chinese cities by Japanese bombers since 1937. China needed an "instant air force" if it was to avoid collapse in its war with Japan. On December 21, 1940, Chennault, Soong and General Mow of the Chinese Air Force met in secret with Morgenthau, Philip Young and asked for American planes and pilots with which to fire bomb Tokyo and other Japanese cities. These American planes and pilots would operate as a "Chinese Air Force" for political reasons.

Secretary of the Treasury Morgenthau was receptive to Chennault's idea, but Chief of Staff, General Marshall pointed out sending American planes and pilots to bomb Japan could provoke Japan to attack American installations even if the planes and crews were purportedly serving in the

Chinese Air Force. Instead Chennault was given 100 Curtiss-Wright Tomahawks (Army designation P-40, fighters), and in the spring of 1941, President Roosevelt, according to legend, issued a "secret executive order" authorizing American military pilots, mechanics and technicians to resign from our armed forces and enter the employ of the Central Aircraft Manufacturing Company (CAMCO) which was to provide pilots and planes to the Chinese Air Force.

In July of 1941, American pilots and technicians began arriving in Rangoon, Burma. This did not go unnoticed by the Japanese Consulate in Rangoon. On July 23, 1941, Japan invaded French Indo-China and the American intelligence community learned Japan planned to invade Thailand, Malaya, and the Dutch East Indies. On July 26, 1941, the United States froze all Japanese assets in America and imposed a total trade embargo against Japan. Chennault's plan to firebomb key Japanese cities from bases in China was resurrected in the form of a Joint Board Plan 355 (JB 355). JB 355 was backed by Roosevelt who felt we should beat the Japanese to the punch by bombing Japan from bases in China. JB 355 was approved on July 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, and 19, 1941, by military and cabinet officials. It received President Roosevelt's endorsement on July 23, 1941. JB 355 called for as many as 300 to 500 airplanes (350 fighters and 150 bombers) to be operational in China by

October 31, 1941. JB Plan was to be accomplished in two phases. The first phase contemplated the supply to China of 100 Curtiss P-40 Tomahawks, 100 Republic P-43 Lancers, and 100 Lockheed Hudson bombers. The Curtiss P-40s were to be operational by July, 1941, and the P-43s were to be operational by September. The second phase called for the supply of an additional 150 fighters (100 P-43 or P-47 aircraft and 50 Bell P-39 Airacobras) as well as 50 additional bombers (either the Martin B-26 Marauder or the Douglas B-23 Dragon).

The Tactical Objectives of JB 355 were to: (1) attack Japanese air bases and supply dumps in French Indo-China, (2) attack Japanese naval and supply vessels, (3) attack Japanese shipping on the Yangtze River, (4) support offensive operations of the Chinese armies, and (5) engage in "occasional raids of Japanese industrial establishments in Japan (sic)."

The Strategic Objectives of JB 355 were to: (1) Force diversion of Considerable portion of available Japanese air force to defense of Japanese establishment on south China coast, (2) Enable Chinese armies to assume offensive operations which will make necessary heavy reinforcement of Japanese troops in China, (3) Destruction of Japanese supplies and supply ships in order to handicap operations of and expeditionary force to the south of Indo-China, (and) (4) Destruction of

Japanese factories in order to cripple production of munitions and essential articles for maintenance of economic structure of Japan.” Targets for the American “special air unit” included: Nagasaki, Kobe, Osaka and Tokyo.

Members of the Second AVG set sail from California on November 21, 1941, their Lockheed Hudson Bombers sitting on the tarmac at the airfield in Burbank, California. Six days later, the Japanese task force sailed for Pearl Harbor. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, JB 355 was scrapped leaving Chennault with about 100 fighters and 90 pilots to defend China against 1,500 Japanese fighters and bombers based in China, Thailand, Malaya and French Indochina.

Despite being badly outnumbered the First AVG/Flying Tigers shot down 296 aircraft with a loss of 14 AVG aircraft in combat. While the Army Air Force was suffering devastating losses to the Japanese in the Philippines, the Flying Tigers were experiencing a kill ratio of 20 victories for every AVG plane lost in combat. The Flying Tigers became the first “superstars” of World War Two. The Army resented their success. When the AVG disbanded, the Army Air Force “adopted” their logos and trademarks claiming the Flying Tigers had “transitioned” to the Army Air Force’s 23rd Fighter Group.

In fact, only five pilots accepted induction into the Army. Only in 1991 did America recognize the Flying Tigers as American Military Veterans. This Film Proposal, if produced, would tell their story.

B. A Flying Tiger's Rules for Living

Imagine yourself a United States military pilot who resigns his officer's commission for a one-year tour of duty as a fighter pilot flying in defense of China, which has been raped, bombed and plundered by the Japanese military. Imagine flying as a civilian employed by a Chinese corporation where there are no rules except (1) dive to attack the enemy planes with the sun at your back; (2) work as part of a two plane element where element leaders are protected by their wingmen; (3) never dogfight with the Japanese fighter planes, but use "hit and run" tactics; and (4) kill or be killed. Your pay is triple your military salary, and you will receive a \$500.00 bonus for each Japanese plane you destroy.

C. A Flying Tiger's Training

Imagine being trained in air combat tactics by a retired Air Corps captain, Claire Chennault, who was an instructor in fighter tactics at the Air Corps Tactical School. Imagine going into combat knowing you will always be outnumbered by the Japanese Air Force.

D. A Flying Tiger's Leisure Time

Imagine flying air combat in the defense of Rangoon, Burma (a British colony) and, on your days off, you and squadron mates date British women, go to the movies and dine at the Silver Grill Restaurant.

E. A Flying Tiger's Airplane

Imagine flying a plane into combat that has been patched up with salvaged parts by a conscripted auto mechanic called "Herman the German," who really is a German citizen and your country is at war with his. Imagine flying planes into combat that are obsolescent, that are powered by engines assembled from components that did not meet Air Corps specifications, and which have civilian radios and guns that were scrounged from British supplies.

F. Celebrity Status

Imagine Time/Life writer Clare Boothe Luce, a female war correspondent and Eric Sevareid of CBS interviewing members of your squadron and articles about your group's exploits are widely circulated in the Western press. At night, you can pick up a San Francisco station on the short wave radio and hear reports of your group's success being broadcast back home.

G. The Highs and Lows of Combat Flying

Imagine the exhilaration of firing your guns, smelling the cordite from the two .50 caliber machine guns above your instrument panel as you witness your adversary's vertical descent in a plume of smoke. Imagine on the same day of your victory hearing that a squadron mate was riddled by machine gun fire while suspended from his parachute, after he bailed out of his burning plane.

H. How the Royal Air Force Viewed the Flying Tigers

Imagine a squadron of RAF Hurricane pilots flies into Mingaladon Airport, your principal base in Rangoon, and upon meeting you and your

colleagues (armed with side arms, drinking cokes and smoking cigars), the British Squadron Commander, "Bunny" Stone (a Battle of Britain veteran) later reports that he felt like he had walked onto the set of a Hollywood western.

I. The Call to Battle

Imagine sitting in the alert area and hearing, "Go get 'em cowboys," as the signal to intercept incoming Japanese planes. Imagine returning from a battle over Rangoon and finding a wounded Japanese pilot deliberately crashed into a plane on Mingaladon, a graphic illustration of the zeal of your adversary.

J. The Source of the Flying Tiger name

Imagine being saluted as Fei Hu (Flying Tigers) by the Chinese, who worship Colonel Chennault, almost as a god. Imagine emblems for your group being designed by Walt Disney Studios.

K. Mercenary Pilots Rejecting Orders and Tendering Resignations

Imagine that in protest to missions you and your mates consider too dangerous for any modest return in tactical benefit, you and most of the other pilots submit your resignations, and the general staff, which issued the order, rescinds it.

L. Chennault's Radio Warning Net

Imagine having a radio warning net that tells you in advance of approaching enemy planes and places you and your group at a tactical advantage to make the interception.

M. The Poor Attempts by the American Film Industry to Depict the Flying Tigers

If you can imagine these things, you can imagine the sensations experienced by the American Volunteer Group (Flying Tigers), America's first covert air force. This remarkable but true story has never been

accurately portrayed or meaningfully developed by the American film industry.

N. Republic's "Flying Tigers"

There have been two motion pictures referencing the exploits of the Flying Tigers. The first was Republic Studio's "Flying Tigers," starring John Wayne. Although a big Wayne fan, I do not view this as one of his better motion pictures. The film was conceived by two AVG ground personnel who were homosexuals, and Chennault did not approve, either of their lifestyle or their script. The credits at the end give thanks to William D. Pawley of CAMCO, the Chinese front company that ostensibly paid AVG salaries, and to the Curtiss-Wright Airplane Company. Republic gave no credit to Claire Chennault, the creator of the AVG, for good reason. He disapproved of the film.

Republic's "Flying Tigers" bears no resemblance to what really happened in China. In the film, the pilots are former barnstormers and racing pilots. In reality, they were all military-trained pilots. The film has them in combat before Pearl Harbor. The first combat was over Kunming on December 20, 1941. The film portrays Wayne as the trusty

unit leader flying combat missions. The real leader, Claire Chennault, was not flying combat after the AVG was formed.

Republic's film has a civilian transport plane being used as a bomber. No stunt like this was ever employed by the AVG. Finally, and most importantly, the Republic film never tells us who the Flying Tigers were, where they came from or how they felt as mercenary pilots in a far away land. Republic's "Flying Tigers" is a Hollywood movie in the pejorative sense of the term "Hollywood."

O. Warner Brothers Studio's "God is My Co-Pilot"

The second film, Warner Brothers' "God is My Co-Pilot," was released in 1945. At the time it was released, the American public knew (or more correctly, thought it knew) who the Flying Tigers were. Like Republic's movie, there is no development about where the Flying Tigers came from, how they came into being or why they disbanded on July 4, 1942. Like Republic's film, "God is My Co-Pilot" features the self-doubt of Col. Robert L. Scott, who confides in a catholic priest that he killed a man that day, and he wonders if he will return home hollow from his war experiences. Scott is admonished not to linger in self-doubt, since it will be perceived by the men he must lead in combat.

The exploits of Scott are embellished by Warner Brothers and are not factually accurate. He shot down no Japanese planes before the AVG disbanded. There was no "Tokyo Joe." The Tigers did not bomb Hong Kong on July 4, 1942. In fact, Chennault used rumors that he would bomb Hong Kong to keep the Japanese off balance while he struck other targets in eastern China.

Johnny Petach, who is shot down over an airbase before the AVG disbanded, was really killed on a dive bombing mission after the AVG disbanded, since he stayed on two weeks with other Tigers to break in the Air Force replacements. More importantly, Petach had married AVG nurse Emma Jane "Red" Foster, who returned to the States pregnant with his child – talk about angst!

P. Why the American Film Industry Did Not Tell the Truth about the Flying Tigers

Both the Republic and Warner Brothers films are simplistic, Saturday matinee features, which were sanitized to maintain morale for the war effort. In lieu of horses and revolvers, we have planes and machine guns. Hollywood did not tell the audience that the AVG was

formed before Pearl Harbor by a "secret executive order," designed to circumvent American neutrality laws.

Q. The Flying Tigers – America's First Covert Air Force and Precursor to Air America

The AVG was a covert American air force, with American military pilots and American planes that were provided to China before Pearl Harbor. After the Second World War ended, Chennault and others formed Civil Air Transport (CAT) that was eventually purchased by the CIA and renamed "Air America."

R. The Film Industry's Self-Imposed Censorship?

When the AVG was disbanded on July 4, 1942, the official position for propaganda purposes was that the AVG had been absorbed into the Air Force's 23rd Fighter Group. Only five Flying Tiger pilots accepted induction into the Army Air Force. Exercising appropriate discretion (call it censorship if you wish, but remember America was fighting for its survival), the American film industry withheld from the public the questionable legality of the AVG's origins. History had caught up with Roosevelt's vision. By the time the flying Tigers achieved celebrity

status, America was at war with Japan. The legal origins of this covert American air force mattered little to the average American.

S. A Chance to Tell the Truth About the Flying Tigers

The 1970, movie "Tora!Tora!Tora!," by 20th Century Fox was made twenty-nine years after Pearl Harbor. "Tora!Tora!Tora!" could not have been made during World War II for a number of reasons. First, we could not let the Japanese know we were intercepting their coded transmissions. Secondly, Americans would have been outraged to think that our government knew attack by Japan in the east was imminent. A generation had to pass before 20th Century Fox could tell Americans the truth about Pearl Harbor. By the same token, an accurate portrayal of the Flying Tigers is only possible years after their exploits took place.

T. Script Option Number One, a Docu-Drama

A dramatic motion picture about the Flying Tigers could parallel the format of "Tora!Tora!Tora!" The film would open with an America First rally in 1941, with Col. Charles Lindbergh speaking on national radio to a country that wants to stay out of World War II. We would then move to a back room in the White House, where Claire Chennault and T.V. Soong

(Madame Chiang's brother) are meeting with Tommy Corcoran and Treasury Secretary Morgenthau, requesting the formation of a covert air force in China. The script would chronicle the recruiting, transporting, training, fighting, living, loving and disbanding as outlined in the remainder of this proposal. The film could conclude with A.E. Houseman's poem, "Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries." (See Footnote 7, infra.)

U. Script Option Number Two, Trace the Exploits of R.T. Smith or Charlie Bond or Jim Howard, or all Three Men

Gen. Charles Bond (still living) was in the First Squadron and is credited with 8.75 victories. Bond was in the thick of things from the first fight over Kunming on December 20, 1941. He then rotated to Rangoon, participated in the surprise attack on the Japanese Air Force headquarters in Chiang Mai, Thailand, ferried new fighters from India, got shot down twice, and finished his tour staying on an extra two weeks to break in the Army pilots after the Flying Tigers officially disbanded. Bond dated women, encountered Claire Booth Luce, and was close to Chennault. His exploits are chronicled in a well-written book, A Flying Tiger's Diary. Together with First Squadron Leader Bob Neale (the leading AVG ace with 15.5 victories) and Emma Jane "Red" (Foster)

Petach, he returned to the States and re-enlisted in the Air Force. He married his sweetheart, who waited for him in the States. Bond's story has a happy ending.

Gen. James H. Howard (deceased) was a former Navy pilot serving as the Deputy Squadron Commander of the Second Squadron under Jack Newkirk. As a Flying Tiger, Howard achieved 6.33 victories and left the AVG, returning to the States. Enlisting in the Air Force, Howard shot down a number of German planes flying in the 9th Air Force and received the Congressional Medal of Honor for attacking a superior number of German planes intent on destroying American B-17 Flying Fortresses. Howard's exploits appear in his well-written book, Roar of the Tiger.

R.T. "Tadpole" Smith (deceased) served in the Third Squadron and is credited with 8.66 victories. He was in the Battle of Rangoon and fought until the end of the AVG, chronicling his exploits in a reproduction of his diary entitled, Tale of a Tiger. Returning to the States after the AVG disbanded, Smith re-enlisted in the Air Force and rejoined Chennault as part of the 14th Air Force.

V. **Script Option Number Three – Tell the Truth with Fictional Characters**

If production concerns over liability in using the real names of persons involved in this story require that fictional characters exhibit their passion and humanity, as with MGM's 1969, film "The Battle of Britain," it is a fairly simple matter to have Jackson "Jack" Davis, a southern boy with a strong military family tree, meet Dora Montgomery, a British lass whose father heads an office for British Petroleum in Rangoon. They can have a chance meeting at the Silver Grill, experience magnetic attraction, and find themselves separated as her family evacuates Rangoon while Jack remains with the AVG to fight the Japanese. Dora had an on again, off again relationship with RAF pilot Kenneth Tuck, but Jack's animal magnetism, his outlandish and humorous antics, plus his performance between the sheets convince Dora that he is the man for her and she dumps Kenneth.

Dora makes her way to Lashio, Burma observing immeasurable human suffering during her travels up the Burma Road. She sees abandoned children and becomes active in relief work to alleviate human suffering, especially that of children.

Jack, following Chennault's orders, evacuates Mingaladon Airport when the last bottles of oxygen are depleted, and the Tigers can no longer climb to their high perch to attack the Japanese out of the sun. While Dora is having her growth experiences on the Burma Road, Jack's best friend gets riddled by machine gun fire while suspended from his parachute after bailing out over Mingaladon Airport. Jack says a few kind words for his dead comrade and the AVG ground crew, including a conscripted Italian race car driver turned airplane mechanic head up the Burma Road, first to Magwe. Deprived of the British radar they had in Rangoon and outside the perimeter of Chennault's radio warning in China, the Japanese catch Jack's planes on the ground, and the AVG has to evacuate to Lashio, Burma, where he is reunited with Dora.

By now, Dora and Jack have had enough excitement, since Dora's father was killed by a Japanese pilot who bombed refugees on the Burma Road. Jack promises Dora that, if he is alive on July 4, 1942, when the AVG dissolves, he will get a job flying for the Chinese National Airline (CNAC).

Dora makes her way to Calcutta. Jack participates in the early morning raid on Chiang Mai, Thailand, taking off from a forward RAF strip in the jungle before dawn with only the headlights of a jeep at the end of

the field to guide him and his fellow pilots. The attack on Chiang Mai is a devastating blow to the Japanese, but two pilots are lost to ground fire.

The old man decides Jack needs a break, so Jack jumps on a DC-3 headed for Calcutta. While laying over in Calcutta, he persuades Dora to go to Kunming, since his hitch is almost up. Dora takes a communications job with the AVG and hears the radio transmissions of the pilots. Jack flies his new plane to Kunming and is directed by Chennault to fly to Kweilin in eastern China and let it slip in the local bar before he departs that the Tigers' objective is the bombing of Hong Kong.

Jack flies to Kweilin, which is surrounded by curious hills and mountains that look like inverted ice cream cones. Jack discovers that Col. Caleb Haynes is in charge of a number of B-25 Mitchell bombers on the field. The target is not Hong Kong, but Nanchang.

Jack is now a Deputy Squadron leader, and the Army pilots like Ajax Baumler and Robert L. Scott have already arrived and are flying with the Tigers. This will be Jack's last combat mission.

The flight to the target is uneventful, the Japanese having believed the target was Hong Kong. Returning to his base, Jack's flight lets down to a low altitude when they are jumped by Zeroes. Jack gets separated from his wingman and is forced to do what Chennault said never to do, dogfight with a Zero.

Jack is alone at low altitude, fighting a swarm of Zeroes. He just keeps turning and twisting and taking shots at the enemy planes in a frantic dogfight. The radio net picks up Jack's transmissions and two Tomahawks are dispatched to assist. Jack's new plane is riddled with bullets and his rescuers arrive just before Jack's number came up. Jack's plane limps back to Kweilin, where he manages to get it down in one piece. Dora gets word he made it and a few days later, Jack is in Kunming for the Tigers' going away party thrown by Madame Chiang. Dora and Jack are married, and he takes an airline job in China. Dora resumes her work helping refugees and orphans. The movie ends with the appearance on the screen of A.E. Houseman's poem, "Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries:"

Their shoulders held the sky suspended. They
stood and earth's foundation stayed. What

God abandoned these defended and saved the sum of things for pay.

W. Material Discussed after this Prologue

Historical data about the origins, recruiting, training, and combat operations of the Flying Tigers appears in the remainder of this proposal.

II.

INTRODUCTION

The Flying Tigers (American Volunteer Group) was a group of mercenary pilots and technicians who inflicted stunning losses on the Japanese Army Air Force (JAAF) during the seven months following the attack on Pearl Harbor. It has been reported that they shot down 296 Japanese aircraft for a loss of 14 of their own aircraft in combat. Some of the fiercest fighting took place in Rangoon, Burma and, after the conclusion of hostilities, the British dragged Martaban Bay to the south of Rangoon and found the remains of 62 Japanese airplanes.

Although historian Daniel Ford puts the JAAF losses at a figure between 110-120 aircraft¹, that does not matter. What does matter is that the courageous deeds of these men, together with the harsh (and sometimes surreal) conditions under which they operated, is a remarkable story that has never been meaningfully developed or exploited by the American film industry.

During the early days of World War II, there was no good news about American forces in combat in the Pacific. The Philippines fell, followed by the Bataan Death March, and then there was the fall of Wake Island. The experience of the British Empire was no better with the fall of Hong Kong and Singapore. Following the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and the devastating defeat of allied forces in the Pacific, America had little to cheer about in Southeast Asia or the Pacific.

Although many Americans had believed the Japanese were inferior industrially and as a military force, the losses suffered by America in the early months of World War II proved these beliefs were wrong. It had been rumored that Japanese pilots required corrective lenses and flew obsolescent planes made from American "scrap metal." Then America confronted the harsh reality of a Japanese military equipped with highly

¹ Ford, Daniel, Flying Tigers: Claire Chennault and the American Volunteer Group, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991. (hereinafter "Ford"), p. 370.

skilled pilots flying fighter planes like the "Zero," that was fast, extremely maneuverable, and could climb like a homesick angel.²

In the midst of America's self doubt and angst, a group of less than 100 American pilots flying American planes were inflicting heavy losses on the Japanese in the skies of Burma and China, despite being greatly outnumbered in combat. These brave American airmen proved that the invincibility of the Japanese pilots and their planes was a myth. Who were these men and where did they come from?

III.

THE ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN VOLUNTEER GROUP

A. THE MOOD OF AMERICA IN 1940-41

The mood of the country in 1940-41, was isolationist. Charles Lindbergh was the champion of the "America First" movement, a political organization devoted to keeping America out of the hostilities in Europe. President Roosevelt resented Lindbergh's activities. When the Roosevelt Administration expressed displeasure with Lindbergh's speeches at

² Many Americans referred to any radial engine low wing monoplane flown by the JAAF or the Japanese Naval Air Force as a "Zero." In fact, the Japanese were operating a number of aircraft

America First rallies, Lindbergh resigned his commission as a Colonel in the United States Army Air Corps in protest.³

B. CLAIRE CHENNAULT – A VISIONARY

Claire Chennault was an experienced Army Air Corps pilot who served as an instructor at the Air Corps Tactical School at Maxwell Field, Alabama. A maverick, Chennault did not believe in the conventional dogma of the Army Air Corps hierarchy in the mid-1930's, that the bomber would always get through. Chennault authored a paper entitled "The Role of Defensive Pursuit," and was outspoken in his disagreement with the beliefs of his superiors. After candidly testifying about his beliefs before a House Subcommittee, it was clear that Chennault's career in the Air Corps was at an end, and he no longer had any meaningful chance for advancement or promotion.

C. CHENNAULT IN CHINA- 1937-40.

Chennault retired from the Air Corps on April 30, 1937, and, on the same day, left for China to conduct a three-month inspection and survey

with radial engines that were low wing monoplanes other than the Mitsubishi A6M2 "Zero."

³ Berg, A. Scott, Lindbergh, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1998, (hereinafter "Berg").

of the Chinese Air Force.⁴ Chennault, a native of Louisiana, was impressed with Madame Chiang Kai-shek, who had been educated at Wesleyan College in Georgia, and she arranged for a Curtiss Hawk 75 Fighter to be acquired for Chennault's use as a consultant to the Chinese Air Force. It has been rumored that Chennault himself shot down 40 Japanese aircraft flying the Hawk 75 airplane. Chennault knew the Curtiss Hawk 75 well, having flown it and the Seversky P-35 in competition for Army Air Corps contracts.

Chennault observed the devastation suffered by China in the bombing of Chungking and other Chinese cities. He became a student of Japanese air tactics, carefully studying captured Japanese Air Force technical materials and manuals.

It is to be remembered that, despite the exploitation of China by European nations, culminating in the "treaty ports"⁵, America maintained a significant presence in China in terms of missionaries, and more than one Flying Tiger pilot had spent time in China during his youth. With the invasion of Manchuria in 1932, onward, there was horrifying news in the media about bombing, raping and plundering of Chinese towns by

⁴ Byrd, Martha, Chennault: Giving Wings to the Tiger, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1987, (hereinafter "Byrd").

⁵ See Tuchman, Barbara W., Stillwell and the American Experience in China 1911-45, Bantam Books, 1970, (hereinafter "Tuchman").

Japanese soldiers. Chennault had come to believe that, equipped with 100 modern American fighter planes and military pilots, he could defeat the Japanese Air Force in China.

D. CHENNAULT AND T.V. SOONG GO TO THE ROOSEVELT ADMINISTRATION SEEKING AID

The origins of the American Volunteer Group was a family affair, since T.V. Soong, the brother of Madame Chiang Kai-shek, and Chennault went to representatives of the Roosevelt Administration in Fall, 1940, seeking military aid for China. Among others, they met with a lawyer named Thomas J. Corcoran, known as "Tommy the Cork," who was a graduate of Harvard. Corcoran was influential in the Roosevelt Administration, and listened to Chennault's plans for the implementation of an air force in China that could defeat the Japanese. When Corcoran told Chennault that all America could give China would be the Curtiss P-40 Tomahawk that would not stand a chance against the Zero in combat, Chennault said that would be true, unless he could teach his pilots to act "abnormally" in handling the P-40. Chennault claimed he could train his pilots to take advantage of the qualities of the Tomahawk over the weaknesses of the Zero.

During Chennault's tenure as an instructor at Maxwell Field, he had argued in favor of a warning net to enable fighters to intercept attacking aircraft. Chennault implemented his theories in China, by creating an elaborate warning net. The warning net was important, because the Chinese did not have resources to waste, either in terms of aircraft or fuel. The warning net would allow intercepting fighter planes to climb to the appropriate position and altitude and attack the incoming Japanese aircraft.⁶

When Corcoran went to Roosevelt and told him of the request made by Soong and Chennault, Roosevelt protested that the idea of giving military aid to China was illegal and contrary to American neutrality laws. It has been rumored that Chennault had delivered to Roosevelt a copy of A.E. Houseman's poem, "Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries."⁷

In order to circumvent American neutrality laws, President Roosevelt issued a secret executive order to Frank Knox, Secretary of the Navy providing for the formation of the American Volunteer Group. It allowed pilots and technicians in the United States Armed Forces to

⁶ For a discussion about the Chinese warning net, please see Smith, Robert M., With Chennault in China, Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 1997 (hereinafter "Smith").

⁷ "Their shoulders held the sky suspended. They stood and earth's foundation stayed. What God abandoned these defended and saved the sum of things for pay."

resign and fight for China, their ostensible employer being the Central Aircraft Manufacturing Company ("CAMCO"), with offices in New York. CAMCO was a front company for a covert American air force in China, operating under the flag of the Chinese government. CAMCO had been formed by H.H. Kung, a brother of China's leader, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. Another CAMCO stockholder was William D. Pawley, who received commissions on sales of Curtiss aircraft to China.

E. CAMCO'S RECRUITING MILITARY PILOTS AND TECHNICIANS TO SERVE ON BEHALF OF CHINA.

Three representatives of CAMCO visited military bases seeking to enlist military pilots and technicians. One was Captain Richard Aldworth, a Vice President of CAMCO and a veteran of the Lafayette Escadrille. A second was Commander Irvine, also a Vice President of CAMCO, who was simply referred to as "the Commander." Finally, there was A.B. "Skip" Adair, a former Army Air Corps pilot who had spent several years working with Chennault in China.

Several of the pilots recruited by CAMCO had "colorful" backgrounds. Gregory Boyington had grown up as Gregory Hallenbeck and had been employed by Boeing Aircraft Company as a draftsman.

After discovering the identity of his true father, Boyington left his wife and child to join the Marine Corps. Navy and Marine pilots were not allowed to be married until at least two years after earning their gold wings and, when Boyington's lie caught up with him, the Marine Corps carefully monitored Boyington's allocation of funds to his wife and children, Boyington having three when he left for China.

John Perry had been washed out of the Army Air Corps for buzzing his girlfriend's house. He borrowed the name and academic record of Edwin Conant and won his gold wings as a naval aviator.

Pilots earning \$210.00 per month were offered \$600.00 per month plus a bonus of \$500.00 for each Japanese aircraft destroyed. Chuck Baisden, a staff sergeant in the Army earning \$72.00 in the Army would earn \$350.00 per month as an armorer with the AVG. The pilots were told that it would be easy duty, since the Japanese airmen they would confront would wear glasses and be flying obsolescent airplanes. All they had to do was to protect the Burma Road, ensuring the supply line stayed open from Rangoon, Burma to Kunming, China.

F. THE PROCUREMENT OF CURTISS TOMAHAWKS AND ALLISON ENGINES

When the CAMCO representatives approached Curtiss-Wright Airplane Company in New York, the Curtiss Tomahawk was approaching the end of its production run. The Tomahawk had evolved from the Curtiss P-36/Hawk 75 series aircraft by replacing the 950 horsepower Pratt & Whitney R-1830 radial engine with Allison's more streamlined, liquid-cooled V-1710 in-line engine, producing 1,100 horsepower. The Tomahawk was to be replaced by the Kittyhawk, which was an improved airplane, having six 50-caliber machine guns in the wings and provisions for a belly tank that could be jettisoned and extend the plane's radius of action and hard points for carrying bombs. CAMCO persuaded Curtiss to build 100 Tomahawks for CAMCO, by agreeing that these 100 aircraft, which had been allocated for Britain, would be replaced by 100 Kittyhawks (the improved model). The Tomahawks CAMCO acquired from Curtiss would be delivered without government-furnished equipment (GFE), i.e., without engines, radios or guns.

The next problem confronting CAMCO was acquiring engines to power the airplanes. When they approached Allison Engine Company in Indianapolis, Indiana, Allison personnel recalled that they had a warehouse of "off-dimension" parts. These were engine parts that did not meet the specifications either for the United States Army or for

Britain. The parts were otherwise sound.⁸ Personnel at Allison used various “salvaging” techniques to construct more than 100 engines for the Tomahawks. The techniques included plating to fit oversized tap holes, fitting steel inserts, and adjusting other parts to employ slightly undersized crankshafts. Despite the fact that these engines were constructed from off-dimension parts, they had a better record in the field than standard Army Air Corps engines. One reason given for this history is that the engines were “hand-fitted,” with close attention being given by Allison factory personnel to the tolerances and clearances in the engines. As will be evident from discussions about the activities of the Flying Tigers in the field, “improvisation” and “canabalization” became techniques and practices exploited by the Flying Tigers to the utmost.

IV.

THE AVG BECOMES A REALITY

A. MEMBERS OF THE AVG SIGN UP TO FIGHT FOR CHINA AND SHIP OFF TO BURMA

⁸ Whitney, Daniel D., Vee’s for Victory! – The Story of the Allison V-1710 Aircraft Engine 1929-1948, Schiffer Military History, 1998 (hereinafter “Whitney”).

Members of the American Armed Forces began signing the CAMCO contracts to resign from the U.S. Military and join CAMCO with a one-year commitment. When their superior officers protested and called the top brass in Washington, they were told that the formation of the American Volunteer Group had the approval of the President, and the enlistees were allowed to proceed with signing their CAMCO contracts. The contract between CAMCO and the AVG members was for one year. The services they were to provide were described in vague terms. The understanding the volunteers had was that, after one year, they could return to service with the armed forces with no loss in grade or seniority. Pilots started at a salary of \$600.00 per month, with flight leaders receiving \$675.00 per month, and squadron commanders receiving \$750.00 per month.⁹ Aircraft mechanics started at a salary of \$250.00 per month.¹⁰

The volunteers sailed to Burma on four ships, the first ship, the President Pierce, leaving in June with Paul Frillman, a chaplain who accompanied many AVG technicians¹¹; the second and largest group of 150 sailed on July 10th on the Dutch liner Jaegersfontein; the third group sailed on the Bloemfontein shortly thereafter; and the last contingent

⁹ Bond, Charles R., Jr., A Flying Tiger's Journey, College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1984 (hereinafter "Bond") at 18-19.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 18.

¹¹ Ford at 73.

sailed on the *Zaandam*, the ship departing San Francisco on September 24, 1941.¹² The volunteers were listed on the passenger manifests as anything but pilots, i.e., musicians, teachers, metal workers, etc., and they all wore civilian clothing.¹³

Not every AVG member succeeded in sailing on one of those four ships. Ajax Baumler did not wait to be recruited by CAMCO. When he heard rumors that pilots were being allowed to resign their commissions to fly and fight for China, he commandeered a Seversky P-35 fighter plane and flew to Washington. Although Baumler signed up, problems with the State Department delayed his departure. He eventually made it as far as Wake Island. By then, World War II was underway, and he had to return to the United States before finally making his way to China in Spring, 1942.

Among the passengers on the *Jaegersfontein* were two American nurses, Emma Jane Foster and Jo Beth Stewart. These nurses befriended James Howard, a Navy pilot who had signed up with the AVG, and Howard would later go on to win the Congressional Medal of Honor,

¹² Bond at 21.

¹³ *Id.*

flying as a fighter pilot with the Ninth Air Force in Europe.¹⁴ While en route to Burma, the volunteers were allowed to begin lessons in Chinese, and Father Neptune's Day celebrations were observed when crossing the International Date Line.¹⁵ One or more ships were escorted by two American destroyers for part of their sailing, and the ships followed a zig-zag course in hopes of avoiding Japanese submarines.

En route to Burma, the ships transporting the volunteers stopped in Hawaii; in Java, Dutch East Indies; in Singapore; and finally in Burma. The first contingent raised such a ruckus when passing through Singapore (they had changed ships from the President Pierce to a coastal vessel, the Penang Trader for the trip to Rangoon) that the captain of the Jaegersfontein was directed to take his passengers straight to Burma.¹⁶ As the AVG passed through Singapore and Rangoon, there was no indication that the British population acknowledged any potential danger.¹⁷ Stores of lend lease materials were sitting on the docks and not being processed for shipment up the Burma Road because of a British obsession with accounting for every one of a particular item shipped before the lot of goods was processed for shipment up the Burma Road to China. This British "red tape" would apparently cost the

¹⁴ Howard, James H., Roar of the Tiger, New York: Orion, 1991 (hereinafter "Howard").

¹⁵ Bond at 23.

¹⁶ Ford at 71-73.

AVG 50 Allison engines and other vital supplies that were lost on the docks of Rangoon after Rangoon fell to the Japanese.¹⁸ Fortunately, a set of major repair tools thrown in with a shipment from Allison Engine Company to the AVG at the last minute did find their way from the docks of Rangoon and allowed the AVG mechanics to cannibalize and interchange engine parts to keep the airplanes flying.¹⁹ It was a source of curiosity to the AVG members that the British, who had so steadfastly and successfully fought off a German invasion during the Battle of Britain were so lackadaisical in their preparation for a potential conflict with the Japanese in the Far East.

B. THE AVG BEGINS TRAINING—KINDERGARTEN AT KYEDAW

Tomahawks in shipping containers were off-loaded from the ships and assembled in Rangoon. One of the 100 aircraft fell off a ship into the water and could not be made flyable. It served as a source of spare parts for other aircraft. Following assembly, Walter Pentecost, a test pilot, checked out the Tomahawks²⁰ and flew the airplanes from Rangoon to Kyedaw Airfield in Toungoo, Burma. Kyedaw Airfield had an asphalt

¹⁷ Klinkowitz, Jerome, With the Tigers Over China – 1941-42, The University Press of Kentucky, 1999 (hereinafter “Klinkowitz”).

¹⁸ Whitney at 126.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 125-126.

runway and was leased by China from the British for purposes of serving as a training facility for the AVG. Toungoo was also a miserable place to live. When the volunteers arrived at Toungoo, some of them were so dispirited by the conditions that they resigned immediately. However, in meeting Chennault, many of the volunteers were impressed by his demeanor, his knowledge of Japanese tactics, and his no nonsense approach to fighting and flying, and they got into the swing of things in getting checked out in the Tomahawk.

The loss of Tomahawks in training accidents was high. Chennault was training pilots in adverse conditions. Many of these pilots had never flown a fighter plane before. There were no Tomahawks equipped with dual controls. Each pilot had to review the aircraft's flight manual and check himself out in the airplane. After the pilots became comfortable in the Tomahawk, Chennault encouraged aggressive combat training, and a head-on collision between two Tomahawks cost the life of John Dean Armstrong, an experienced pilot with over 1,000 hours in his logbook.

C. ORIGINS OF THE TIGER SHARK IMAGES

²⁰ Smith at 20-21.

What was the inspiration for the tiger shark image on the noses of the Tomahawks? Charlie Bond was reading a magazine that depicted British Tomahawks with Tiger Shark faces on the noses. R.T. Smith comments that, on November 18, 1941, the AVG was painting "shark-heads" on the noses of the airplanes and it "look's mean as Hell."²¹

D. THE SQUADRONS BECOME ORGANIZED

The AVG was anything but a spit and polish military organization. The pilots did not salute anybody except for Chennault. The pilots developed a reputation as hell raisers and, when it came time to organize into three squadrons, three squadron leaders were selected who picked their members as children would in a game of pick up baseball. The Navy pilots tended to pick Navy and Marine pilots, while the Army pilots tended to pick Army pilots. The first squadron employed a green apple with Eve chasing Adam as man's first pursuit. The second squadron was named the Panda Bears in honor of China, and the third squadron was named Hell's Angels in honor of the Howard Hughes movie featuring the exploits of World War I pilots.

E. THE RAF'S VIEW OF THE AVG BEFORE THE WAR

The RAF did not think much about the potential of the AVG as a fighting force. The Japanese did not undertake to bomb the AVG out of existence (remember, Japan had been at war with China since 1932), apparently because the Japanese did not regard the AVG as a serious threat. Although discounting the fighting ability of the AVG, after the war began, the RAF tried to persuade China to allow it to absorb the AVG into the RAF. Chennault and Chiang Kai-shek resisted the pleas of the RAF, but recognized that getting supplies up the Burma Road was contingent upon the open port at Rangoon, so the third squadron was dispatched to Rangoon, while the first and second squadrons flew to Kunming to defend the northern portion of the Burma Road.

V.

COMBAT

A. AN OVERVIEW OF AVG COMBAT OPERATIONS FROM DECEMBER 20, 1941, THROUGH JULY 3, 1942

In reviewing the materials available on the combat of the AVG from December, 1941, through July, 1942, it appears that their operations fall

²¹ Smith, R.T., Tale of a Tiger, Tiger Originals, Van Nuys, California, 1988 (hereinafter "R.T. Smith").

into four categories, to wit: (1) air defense missions in support of Rangoon, Kunming and Chungking; (2) strafing missions on enemy air fields and installations; (3) morale flights at low altitude to “show the flag” to the dispirited Chinese army²²; and (4) offensive missions by the Flying Tigers in Eastern China from advance air fields attacking Japanese air fields in Eastern China and drawing the Japanese into combat, thereby diverting the Japanese from a bombing campaign on major cities in China.

B. KUNMING – THE TIGERS’ FIRST SUCCESS

It was Chennault’s conviction that, if he could inflict sufficient losses on the Japanese bombers raiding Chinese cities, daylight bombing raids on those cities would stop. On December 20, 1941, 10 bombers were detected by the warning net en route to Kunming. Charlie Bond of the first squadron relates that at least 3 of the 10 bombers were shot down, with several more bombers claimed as “probables.”²³ R.T. Smith, who was with the third squadron in Rangoon (and who was not therefore in Kunming on December 20th) relates that the Hell’s Angels in Rangoon received a telegram about the raid of December 20th, indicating that 3

²² The morale missions put the Tigers at low altitude and in positions of a sitting ducks for enemy airplanes and lead to the so-called “pilot revolt” with Chennault in mid-April, 1942.

bombers were certainly shot down, with 2 or 3 more thought to have gone down.²⁴

C. THE DEFENSE OF RANGOON

The AVG came into worldwide attention following the Japanese raid on Rangoon of December 23, 1941. The Japanese attacked Rangoon with 2 waves of 27 bombers in each wave and 40 escort fighters. The Hell's Angels claimed 15 Japanese planes destroyed, but 3 AVG airplanes were lost, including 2 pilots, Neil Martin and Henry Gilbert.²⁵ The next day, December 24, 1941, the Japanese in a radio broadcast from Bangkok, Thailand declared that the Japanese Air Force would return on Christmas Day to deliver some Christmas presents.²⁶

On Christmas Day, 1941, R.T. Smith relates that 3 waves of bombers with 27 bombers in each wave and 30 fighters raided Rangoon at 11:00 a.m. The AVG claimed 14 bombers and 12 fighters destroyed, and R.T. Smith returned from combat with 34 bullet holes in his airplane.²⁷ Fierce air fighting raged on for months with Duke Hedman shooting down 5 planes in one day, and Parker Dupoy returning after

²³ Bond at 60-63.

²⁴ R.T. Smith at 157.

²⁵ *Id.* 159-161.

²⁶ *Id.* at 162.

colliding with a Japanese aircraft (the Japanese aircraft having crashed, and Parker Dupoy's aircraft having several feet missing from its right wing).

The Panda Bears flew into Rangoon on December 30th and relieved the Hell's Angels, which left Rangoon for Lashio on December 31st.²⁸

D. LIFE IN RANGOON AND HOW THE TIGERS WERE VIEWED BY THE RAF PILOTS

The existence of the AVG during the defense of Rangoon was bizarre. By day, they were fighting for their lives or preparing aircraft to keep them in the sky. By evening, they lived on colonial estates, receiving clean clothes, a bath and a meal. The Tigers dated British women and could be seen in Rangoon's night spots, like the Silver Grill. The air fighting over Rangoon raged on through the end of February. The AVG was running up its tally, but the RAF was not fairing very well. The RAF pilots were flying obsolescent Brewster Buffalos, which, although maneuverable, were not as fast as the Tomahawks. Further, the British pilots were admonished that, if they dove away from an enemy aircraft after engaging in combat, it would be considered grounds

²⁷ *Id.* at 163-165.

²⁸ *Id.* at 170-171.

for court martial. Conversely, the AVG pilots had been counseled by Chennault not to get in “dog fights” with the Japanese aircraft, but to dive out of the sun, use their speed, shoot, dive away, climb for altitude and repeat the process. The Japanese fighters could not keep up with the Tomahawks in a dive. The Tigers employed “hit and run tactics,” while the RAF tried more conventional air combat tactics.

How did the RAF and AVG pilots get along? What were the impressions of the RAF pilots about the Flying Tigers? Kenneth Hemingway, an RAF pilot, writes of meeting the Tigers at Mingaladon Airfield outside of Rangoon. Upon his arrival, Hemingway observed a well-built AVG pilot wearing a revolver in a finely worked leather holster.²⁹ The RAF pilot thought the American pilot looked dangerous.³⁰

Newly arrived RAF Squadron Leader Bunny Stone sought an audience with the AVG commanding officer.³¹ After entering the AVG quarters and encountering an American pilot in a reclined position, smoking a cigar and holding a Coke bottle, who lazily motioned Stone to

²⁹ Hemingway, Kenneth, Wings over Burma, London: Quality, 1944, (hereinafter “Hemingway”), at 122.

³⁰ Id.

³¹ Cotton, M.C., “Bush,” Hurricanes over Burma, London: Grub Street, 1995, (hereinafter “Cotton”).

AVG Squadron Leader Jack Newkirk, Stone felt he had walked onto the set of a Western.³²

By the time Stone and Hemingway arrived in Rangoon, the Flying Tigers' exploits had been publicized by the media, and the RAF pilots thought it prudent to get advice from their AVG counterparts about fighting the Japanese.

The British possessed the only radar set in Rangoon. British and AVG aircraft were disbursed about Mingaladon on different (intersecting) runways. When enemy aircraft appeared on the radar scope, a Flying Tiger would signal the awaiting pilots with the words: "Go get 'em cowboys."

Although Singapore in Malaya had fallen rather quickly to the Japanese, Rangoon hung on for two and one-half months, while vital supplies made their way up the Burma Road to China. However, when the British pulled out with their radar at the end of February, 1942, the Tigers' time at Rangoon was coming at an end, since the AVG was "blind" to incoming air raids without the benefit of radar.

³² Id. at 236.

The AVG fell back to Magwe, but again, without the benefit of radar, Japanese attacks destroyed Tomahawks on the ground, and the Tigers had to fall back to Lashio and ultimately Kunming.

While the Tigers were still in Rangoon and when there was a lull in activity, Ken Jernstedt and Bill Reed took it upon themselves to strafe a number of Japanese airplanes in Malaya southeast of Rangoon. Chennault congratulated them on the number of airplanes destroyed by proclaiming they had set a "new world record."

As civil and military personnel evacuated Rangoon, it is a testament to the AVG that the Japanese did not attempt bombing missions during the evacuation. The actions of the AVG had bought time to effect an orderly withdrawal from Rangoon and to get vital equipment up the Burma Road to China. Rangoon, which had been an orderly and leisurely city with offices serving as headquarters to major corporations and with posh restaurants and hotels, was reduced to chaos when the order was given to open the gates of the prisons and mental institutions. There was looting in the streets and, in the midst of this chaos, AVG personnel confiscated or commandeered such property and equipment as would be beneficial to the war effort or to them personally.

Although the AVG had come to worldwide attention as a consequence of their destruction of Japanese airplanes over Rangoon following the reports of Claire Booth Luce that appeared in Time Magazine, not all operations enjoyed that level of success.

E. THE REQUEST FOR MORALE FLIGHTS AND THE PILOT REVOLT

By mid-April, 1942, the Chinese and British armies were being badly beaten by the Japanese. The Generalissimo wanted morale flights over the Chinese army at low altitude. Chennault indulged the Generalissimo, and the pilots revolted. The problem with flying at low altitude over friendly troops just to be seen by them was that the pilot engaged in this activity was a sitting duck for enemy aircraft. R.T. Smith relates in his diary of April 18, 1942, that Chennault called a meeting with the pilots, Chennault announcing he was now a Brigadier General in the United States Army Air Corps. Chennault said he was now taking orders from General Stillwell (Chennault and Stillwell never agreed on the application of air power in China), and Chennault told the pilots that those who wanted to "show the white feather" should resign and clear

out.³³ Smith told Chennault that there was a difference between common sense and cowardice, and 28 out of 34 pilots signed a document offering to resign.³⁴

The next day, on April 19th, the resignation paper was submitted to Chennault.³⁵ Chennault declared that he could not accept the pilots' resignations, and anyone leaving would be guilty of desertion.³⁶ Eventually, the whole affair was forgotten, but the pilots' displeasure with the morale flights requested by General Stillwell and/or the Generalissimo resulted in the flights being terminated.³⁷ According to General Stillwell, the low-level flights requested were for reconnaissance, to learn the enemy's lines of approach.³⁸ With the defeat of allied forces on the ground, one can understand Stillwell's desire to blame the AVG for the disaster in Burma.

F. THE STRAFING OF JAPANESE TROOPS AT SALWEEN GORGE

In May, 1942, Colonels Caleb Haynes and Robert L. Scott were dispatched in a C-47 transport to fly General Stillwell out of Burma. Stillwell refused transportation by air and insisted that he "walk out" of

³³ R.T. Smith at 284.

³⁴ *Id.* at 283.

³⁵ *Id.* at 285.

³⁶ *Id.* at 285.

Burma.³⁹ On May 7, 1942, Charlie Bond relates that the Japanese were building a bridge across the Salween River, and Tex Hill lead a flight of new P-40E Kittyhawks equipped with shackles to carry bombs, and they bombed and strafed the Japanese at Salween Gorge, the AVG bombing and strafing the Japanese for the next four days. After the Salween Gorge incident, the Japanese army was heading south, not north, on the Burma Road.⁴⁰ Had the Japanese not been stopped at the Salween River, China might have fallen or been forced to sue for peace, and resources devoted by the Japanese to fighting China might have been diverted to other fronts to the detriment of the allies' cause.

G. MAY, 1942 – MORE GROUND ATTACK FLIGHTS AND THE ARMY INDUCTION BOARD

With the approaching monsoon season, Chennault decided on May 12th that the second squadron should conduct an attack on Gia Lam Aerodrome in (then) French Indochina. The attack resulted in 15 Japanese aircraft being left burning, and 20 more were damaged.⁴¹ United States Army Air Corps, Brigadier General Clayton Bissell had appeared on the scene. Bissell was a World War I fighter pilot and had

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ Tuchman at 282-283

³⁹ Scott, Robert L., Jr., God is My Co-Pilot, New York: Scribner's, 1943 (hereinafter "God is My Co-Pilot) at 101 ("The General Preferred to Walk").

been junior to Chennault prior to Chennault's retirement from the Air Corps. In 1937. In order to ensure "control" over Chennault, it had been decided that Bissell would be promoted to Brigadier General one day before Chennault's promotion, thereby making Bissell senior to Chennault.

Initially, Bissell was not convinced the AVG pilots would have fit into the Army Air Corps, but gradually his assessment of these pilots improved. When Stillwell had seen AVG pilots, he said they looked "damn good."

In any event, when the decision was made that the AVG would be absorbed by the 23rd Fighter Group of the Army Air Corps., and Bissell made a pitch to the pilots that they could either accept immediate induction into the Army Air Corps. or they could go back home on their own dime and face the draft boards. This was a breach of the agreement the Flying Tigers had made when resigning from the military, since they understood that they could return in rank and grade to the military with no loss of seniority. Bissell's actions toward the Flying Tigers offended them to such an extent that only 5 of the AVG pilots agreed to induction into the Army Air Corps. Also, as an expression of their disdain for

⁴⁰ Bond at 171.

⁴¹ Bond at 171-172.

Bissell, the AVG taught a Chinese worker at the airport the phrase "Piss on Bissell," which he would say with a smile to each person deplaning an airplane.

H. THE FLYING TIGERS' OPERATIONS IN EASTERN CHINA AS THE AVG WINDS DOWN

As a tactic to keep the Japanese bombers away from Chinese cities, including Chungking and Kunming, Chennault dispatched Tomahawks and Kittyhawks to Kweilin, Ling Ling and Heng Yang in Eastern China. Chennault would attack Japanese aerodromes within striking range from those eastern air fields, and the Japanese would respond in kind with air battles taking place over Eastern China.

On July 4, 1942, the AVG ceased to officially exist, although a number of AVG pilots had agreed to stay on for an additional two weeks while the new Army Air Corps. pilots got up to speed. It should be pointed out that, during the spring, 1942, Col. Scott had flown as a guest with the Flying Tigers on several missions, and Ajax Baumler had finally made his way to China.

A bombing raid was launched on July 10, 1942, the first element being lead by John Petach (who had married Nurse Foster), and the second element was lead by Captain Baumler. In Baumler's combat report, he noted that Petach began his dive from 6,500 feet and the terminus of his dive was at 2,300 feet when his plane burst into flames around the cockpit and main fuel tanks. Baumler opined that Petach's plane had suffered several direct hits from 20 mm. anti-aircraft fire after he released his bombs.

I. THE FLYING TIGERS RETURN HOME

With the exception of 5 pilots and a number of ground crewmen, most of the AVG pilots elected to go home. Bob Neale, the AVG's leading ace, together with Charlie Bond and Emma Jane Petach left Kunming on a C-47 on July 19, 1942.⁴² The 14th Air Force and the 23rd Fighter Group took over the name of the "Flying Tigers," but the AVG, which had earned a name in history, ceased to exist. Many of the Flying Tiger pilots found their way back into combat, among them, Pappy Boyington and Jim Howard, both of whom were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Boyington was credited with over 20 Japanese airplanes before being shot down and sent to a Japanese prisoner of war camp. Howard

⁴² Bond at 207-208.

was decorated for single-handedly holding 30 Luftwaffe fighters at bay over Germany while escorting B-17 Flying Fortresses.

VI.

COLORFUL PERSONALITIES

The story of the Flying Tigers presents an opportunity to showcase a number of very colorful characters who are briefly described below:

1. General Claire Chennault. The unorthodox nature of the AVG and its members has origins in the personality of its organizer, Chaire Chennault. Because of uncompromising belief in the fighters' ability to intercept and destroy the bomber, Chennault's military career was effectively over at the age of forty-three. Retiring with the rank of Captain after serving in the Army since World War I, Chennault's career could have ended in failure. Down, but not out, Chennault ventured to China, serving as "Colonel" Chennault having been made an honorary Colonel by the Governor of Louisiana.

China's lack of resources made Chennault's "early warning net" a necessity. Having been spurned by the Air Corps for his refusal to acquiesce in its orthodoxy, it is ironic that, in the dark days of World War II, this Air Corps reject, surpassed in rank and influence by his contemporaries, was the only commander of any allied air force to deal the Japanese stunning blows in air combat. In the early months of World War II, history caught up with Chennault's vision and proved him right. Eric Sevareid, then a reporter for the Columbia Broadcasting System, related that the Chinese worshipped Chennault, "almost as a god."⁴³

Only in an air force of mercenaries could we have a pilot revolt resulting in the termination of morale flights and escort missions in support of British bombers. However, if we were to believe Greg Boyington's "fictitious" account of his AVG experiences, the pilots declined the flights because bonuses were paid only for Japanese aircraft that were destroyed and confirmed.⁴⁴

⁴³ Sevareid, Eric, Not So Wild a Dream, New York: Knopf, 1946 (hereinafter "Sevareid"), at 332.

⁴⁴ Boyington, Gregory, Tonya, Indianapolis: Bubbs-Merrill, 1960.

Chennault was not on U.S.S. Missouri when the Japanese surrendered, having been relieved of his command of the 14th Air Force shortly before the end of the war. Chennault achieved and accomplished "the impossible" because he was unorthodox. His absence from the decks of the U.S.S. Missouri is no surprise.

Retired from the Army Air Corps in 1937, then-Captain Chennault had fought a losing battle with top brass of the Army Air Corps in his belief that fighter planes would play a major role on the next major conflict. With his career going nowhere, and with his hearing impaired from all his years of flying open-cockpit aircraft, Chennault retired from the Army Air Corps in spring, 1937, and immediately departed for China to inspect the Chinese Air Force. Chennault's theories about defensive air pursuit were vindicated over the skies of China, and his bulldog personality led to numerous conflicts with his superior officers, including General Stillwell, the commander of ground troops in the China/Burma theater and also with General Clayton Bissell, who had served with Chennault as an instructor at Maxwell Field. Chennault's theories about air combat were vindicated, and his life is the

personification of the American fighting spirit. Although retired from the Air Corps as a captain, Chennault, a friend of the Governor of Louisiana, got himself appointed as an honorary colonel, and he used the title colonel in China when he was a civilian technical advisor to the Chinese Air Force. With his induction into the Army Air Corps following the Pearl Harbor attack, it was determined that Chennault would have the rank of brigadier general, but he would be junior to his old rival, Gen. Bissell, by one day (i.e., Bissell would be promoted to Brigadier General one day before Chennault). Making Bissell senior to Chennault gave the Army Air Corps an additional element of control over Chennault, who was considered a maverick.

2. Gen. Joseph (Vinegar Joe) Stillwell. Stillwell was the commander of armed forces in the China/Burma theater. His command extended to control over the Chinese Army. Stillwell did not understand the application of air power, and Chennault and Stillwell frequently fought about the use of air power in China and the allocation of resources in the China/Burma theater. Because Chennault enjoyed a direct line of communication with President Roosevelt, he was able

to upstage Stillwell with letters to the President resulting in additional resources being directed to the operations of the 23rd Fighter Group and 14th Air Force, which succeeded the Flying Tigers in China.

3. Gen. Clayton Bissell. Bissell had been an instructor with Chennault at Maxwell Field. A World War I fighter pilot, the joke about Bissell when he went to China was that he was more interested in Brasso for polishing his belt buckle than for ammunition and fuel for the airplanes. The Flying Tigers held Bissell in such low esteem that they taught Chinese workers to greet people at the airport with the phrase "Piss on Bissell."

4. Gen. Jimmy Doolittle. It is to be remembered that, in April, 1942, a group of B-25 Mitchell bombers successfully bombed Tokyo and other cities in Japan. All but one of the airplanes crashed,⁴⁵ since their premature departure from the aircraft carrier Hornet gave them insufficient fuel to fly inland and recover at bases in Eastern China. The Flying Tigers were not told of the Tokyo raid, and there has been speculation that, had they been so informed, a radio beacon could

have been set up in Eastern China giving the Doolittle Raiders a better shot at successfully navigating to the bases where they had intended to recover. When Doolittle learned that Chennault had been promoted to Brigadier General, Doolittle gave Chennault his stars, Doolittle having just been promoted following the attack on Tokyo.

5. Maj. David Lee "Tex" Hill. Tex Hill, a former Navy pilot, assumed command of the Second Squadron after Jack Newkirk was killed and stayed on with Chennault as a Major in the Army Air Force after the AVG was dissolved. Tex Hill was born in the Kwang ju area of Korea in 1915. His parents were Presbyterian missionaries, and his father went on to be the Chaplain of the Texas Rangers. Tex was a pretty rough customer. He attacked a Japanese fighter head on above a field in China and shot it down. When the Japanese aircraft came to rest on the airfield, after landing, Tex walked up to the wreckage, kicked the head of the deceased Japanese pilot and said, "All right mister, if that's the way you want to fight, it's all right with me."

⁴⁵ One B-25 landed in Vladivostok, U.S.S.R.

6. Ed Rector. A former Navy pilot, Ed Rector took off in a Tomahawk that had just undergone maintenance and was not scheduled to fly on December 20, 1941, when Japanese bombers were reported in bound from Indo China and headed for Kunming. Rector shot down one bomber before running out of gas and crash landing. Rector became an ace and was one of five Flying Tiger pilots who accepted induction into the Army Air Corps after the AVG disbanded.

7. Bob Neale. After the death of Sandy Sandell during a test flight of a repaired Curtiss P-40, former Navy pilot Bob Neale became the commander of the First Squadron and was the leading ace of the Flying Tigers, with 13 victories to his credit. Neale's tour of duty in China/Burma left him physically exhausted when he returned by air to the United States with Emma Jane "Red" Foster Petach and Charlie Bond.

8. Charlie Bond. Enlisting in the Army Air Corps as a reserve officer, Charlie Bond had hoped to fly fighters. When he was assigned to B-17s as a co-pilot, he found his escape by joining the AVG. Bond shot down 9 planes and was himself

shot down twice. In reading Bond's book, one can see that he lived life on the edge when he was not engaged in air combat. Bond returned to the States with Neale and Emma Jane Petach in mid-July, 1942.

9. Emma Jane "Red" Foster. Emma Jane Foster and Jo Stewart were nurses in the AVG. Emma Jane Foster married John Petach, who was lost in a bombing mission on July 10, 1942, his death having been witnessed by Ajax Baumler, a mercenary pilot who had flown for the Republic (against the Luftwaffe) during the Spanish Civil War.
10. John Petach. John Petach was an aeronautical engineer by training and pilot with several victories during his flying with the AVG. Agreeing to stay on for two additional weeks beyond July 4, 1942, while the Army Air Corps pilots got up to speed, Johnny Petach was lost during a ground attack mission on July 10, 1942. Ajax Baumler wrote the combat report describing Petach's death.
11. Gregory "Pappy" Boyington. Pappy Boyington was a hard-drinking, hard-fighting former Marine pilot whose penchant

for getting into fights is reported in Charlie Bond's book. It is rumored that Boyington had an affair with Olga Greenlaw, the wife of the executive officer to Chennault, Harvey Greenlaw.

12. Olga Greenlaw. Olga Greenlaw looks like a movie star in the color motion pictures taken by the Flying Tigers in China. There are a number of references and materials written by the Flying Tigers describing her as a "knockout." She kept a diary of the AVG's history and wrote The Lady and the Tigers.

13. Harvey Greenlaw. A West Point graduate, Greenlaw was an Army pilot whose career languished. Greenlaw went to China with Col. Jouett who served as an adviser to the Chinese Air Force. Jouett disagreed with the tactics advocated by China's leadership and was relieved. Greenlaw remained in China as a flight instructor and/or as an agent for North American Aviation. Chennault enlisted Greenlaw as part of a makeshift staff to lead the AVG. Greenlaw did not enjoy the respect of the AVG pilots who considered him a "joke."

14. Madame Chiang Kai-shek. Educated in Georgia at Wesleyan College, Madam Chiang Kai-shek helps bridge the cultural gap between the West and the East. She forms a bond with Chennault, which leads to his commitment to the Chinese people to save them from devastation and destruction at the hands of the Japanese.

15. R.T. "Tadpole" Smith. R.T. Smith had been an Army Air Corps instructor pilot who had never flown a P-40. By luck, Smith ended up in the Third Squadron (Hell's Angels) and enjoyed a number of victories over Japanese pilots at the Battle of Rangoon. R.T. Smith kept a diary, and his diary entries are published in his book referenced in the footnotes of this proposal.

16. Robert J. "Sandy" Sandell. Robert Sandell was the Squadron Leader of the First Squadron and died while test flying a repaired Tomahawk in Rangoon on February 7, 1942. He had 5.24 victories to his credit. He was replaced by Bob Neale.

17. Gerhard Neumann. A German national trained as an automobile mechanic, Neumann signed up with the AVG and became an airplane mechanic. With the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Neumann was a citizen of a hostile government (Germany), but served with the Flying Tigers nonetheless. His claim to fame was patching up a captured Japanese Zero that was test flown by Col. Bruce Holloway and compared in performance to the P-40E Kittyhawk.

18. Allen Bert Christman. A cartoon illustrator for the Associated Press, Christman chronicled the adventures of Scorchy Smith, an American mercenary pilot who flew and fought in Latin America. Christman enlisted in the Navy, became a pilot and resigned his commission to join the AVG. After bailing out of his stricken Tomahawk over Rangoon, Christman was shot in his parachute by one or more Japanese pilots on January 23, 1942. For Christman, the distinction between fantasy and reality became blurred. His life imitated "art" as he became the mercenary combat pilot he had illustrated in the newspapers.

19. Paul W. Frillman. A missionary in China, Frillman met Chennault in the late 1930's. When Chennault's AVG scheme won White House approval, Chennault tracked down Frillman, then unemployed, and made him a staff officer in the AVG. Frillman officiated at many services for AVG personnel who died in China/Burma.

20. Duke Hedman. A pilot in the Third Squadron, Hedman shot down five planes in a single sortie, but insisted that his victories be shared with other members of his flight. He is officially credited with 4.84 victories.

21. R.C. "Moose" Moss. A Georgia boy, Moss was credited with four victories and was employed as a pilot for the Chinese National Airline (CNAC) after the AVG was dissolved.

22. Clare Boothe Luce. A female war correspondent, Luce spent time with the AVG and wrote of their exploits in Time Magazine. She described the pilots as the "most wonderful group of kids that ever drew the breath of life." *New York Times*, May 3, 1942.

23. Col. Robert L. Scott. A career officer and West Point graduate, Scott lies about his flying experience in a B-17 and ends up flying supplies to the AVG. Scott flies several missions with the AVG as a "guest." Scott went on to command the 23rd Fighter Group, which replaced the AVG, and wrote of his exploits in God is My Co-Pilot. His book, which was factual, became "fictionalized" in Warner Brother's 1945 movie featuring the same title.

24. Jack Newkirk. Jack Newkirk was the original commander of the Second Squadron. He was killed on a ground attack mission in Thailand on March 24, 1942, and was replaced by Tex Hill. Newkirk was credited with 10.5 victories. Newkirk was an aggressive leader and was very popular with the pilots of the Second Squadron. His loss was felt profoundly by AVG pilots who came to view ground attack missions with disdain.

25. Arvid E. Olson. The Squadron Leader of the Third Squadron, Olson was credited with one victory. Olson's leadership style was in marked contrast to that of Newkirk, since Olson was

more inclined to "direct" his pilots from the ground rather than "lead" them in the air.

26. James H. Howard. A Navy pilot, Jim Howard is credited with 6.33 victories. Following the AVG's dissolution, Howard returned to the States, joined the Army Air Force and won the Congressional Medal of Honor while flying escort missions over Germany in his P-51 Mustang.

27. Joe Rosbert. Raised by his aunt after his father left his family for the bright lights of Vaudville, Rosbert was an excellent student who received a degree as an engineer. Accepted into the Navy as a cadet, Rosbert qualified as captain of the Navy's PBY Catalina while stationed in the west coast. Rosbert heard a presentation by Commander Irvine, an AVG recruiter and resigned his commission to fly for the AVG. Rosbert was put in charge of the AVG men who sailed from San Francisco in early September, 1941. Two of his men got drunk in Hawaii and were late for the appointed boarding time. They refused to board the ship until they drank their moonshine, but their departure was advanced by a thief who took one man's passport and wallet forcing them

to chase the thief and leave their moonshine behind. These same men (drunk again) climbed into the crow's nest of the ship to the dismay of the ship's Dutch captain. Rosbert was reunited with Navy pilots flying PBY Catalinas from the Phillipines. They wanted to join the AVG but stayed behind. Three months later, many of these Navy pilots would be dead, victims of the Japanese pilots and their Zeroes. Rosbert claims 6.3 victories during his tenure with the AVG and lives in Franklin, North Carolina. He has written of his AVG experience in, Flying Tiger Joe's Adventure Story Cookbook. Rosbert and members of the First and Second Squadrons destroyed a number of Japanese bombers on December 20, 1941. The Mayor and citizens of Kunming turned out the next day to thank the Flying Tigers.

28. Charlie Mott. A former Navy pilot, Mott meets Rosbert upon his arrival in Rangoon. The Curtiss P-40s are being equipped with rudimentary "ring and bead" gunsights. However, Mott develops a superior electric gunsight and shows it to Rosbert. Mott gets shot down on March 24, 1942, during the same ground attack mission where John Newkirk was killed. Mott

is captured by the police in Thailand and is a prisoner until 1945.

29. Ajax Baumler. Like Col. Robert L. Scott and Col. Bruce Holloway, Ajax Baumler arrives in China as an Air Corps pilot. These Army pilots are allowed to fly as "guests" of the AVG pilots on missions before the AVG disbanded on July 4, 1942. Baumler had flown as a mercenary pilot in the Spanish Civil War fighting the fascists. Baumler is an Army pilot in the 23rd Fighter Group which assumes the identity of the "Flying Tigers," including the shark noses on the planes and the flight jackets with Chinese emblems advising the Chinese that the pilot is a friend of China fighting the Japanese. Baumler witnessed the death of Johnny Petach during a dive bombing/ground attack mission on July 10, 1942. Baumler survives numerous combat missions in China with the 23rd Fighter Group and achieves "ace" status.

VI.

WHY THIS FILM SHOULD BE MADE

A film about the exploits of the Flying Tigers should be made for the following reasons:

1. This is a great adventure story that has never been meaningfully developed or exploited as a dramatic motion picture and it contains the following elements:
 - a. At a time when American public opinion is against our becoming involved in wars beyond our shores, the President signs a "secret executive order" providing for the formation of a covert American air force in China to protect a vital supply line, the Burma Road.
 - b. The recruiting of the pilots by CAMCO officers on Army, Navy and Marine bases gives the story a neat twist, especially when the volunteers' superior officers tried to block the resignations from the United States military. The volunteers' enlistment as mercenaries working for a Chinese front company, CAMCO has the support of the President.

c. The trip from San Francisco to Rangoon was an odyssey. Many of the men were armed with various kinds of guns, and some were so drunken and rebellious as to be thrown out of hotels. These mercenaries "raised hell" in Hawaii, Java, the Phillipines, Singapore, and Rangoon. They were on the adventure of a lifetime and they knew it. Nonetheless, it was a shoestring operation, since Rosbert did not receive pay for his men until Singapore. By this point in their journey, the men had run up some significant bills on the Bloemfontein and the Dutch captain was concerned about the accounts being paid. The Five Thousand Dollars (\$5,000.00) required to transport Rosbert's men from Singapore to Rangoon arrives after a few anxious days in Singapore.

d. The setting for combat in Burma and China is unusual to say the least. Looking over the harbor in Rangoon is a temple over three hundred and fifty feet tall that is covered in gold leaf. Burma is occupied by elephants, tigers and water buffalo. China is a region of the world where warlords control the local population and territory. Some regions of China and Burma are occupied by very

primitive people. These people are encountered by Eric Shilling when he crashes his Curtiss CW-21 Demon, high altitude interceptor. Prostitution and drug use are rampant. The setting for aerial warfare is bizarre.

- e. The "British connection" is a story in itself. British red tape leaves vital war supplies sitting on the docks in Rangoon rather than making their way up the Burma Road to China. After the war starts and the Flying Tigers are dispatched to combat Japanese in an attempt to prevent the wholesale destruction of Rangoon, the British officials hamper the effort by insisting that all the pilots be properly licensed to operate their warplanes. The official British approach to fighting the Japanese is to engage the fighters (dogfight) and not dive away for another pass, while the Tigers employ hit and run tactics. When the British pilots adopt the Tigers tactics, they are threatened with court martial. In their rule over Burma, the British had not endeared themselves to many of the Burmese people. It was with mixed feelings that the Burmese observed the fall of Rangoon to the Japanese. Most of the "casualties" suffered by the British Army in Burma, were

Burmese soldiers who deserted and returned to their families.

f. Claire Chennault proved one man can have a profound impact on world events even if he does not hold public office or rule a country. Without the Flying Tigers there is every reason to believe the Japanese would have crossed the Salween River and forced China out of World War Two. To this day, the people of China treasure the memory of Gen. Claire Chennault and his Flying Tigers.

2. It illustrates the essence of the American fighting spirit, i.e., Americans who stood up against a military juggernaut that was raping, bombing and destroying China. These men, with obsolescent airplanes powered by engines fabricated from out-of-tolerance parts, with improvised radios and scrounged machine guns were able to beat the Japanese fighter pilots at their own game over China. While the Flying Tigers may have received obsolescent airplanes and engines not satisfying Army Air Corps standards, it is very clear that the men of the Flying Tigers were "the first team."

3. A film about the Flying Tigers would illustrate the importance of following a higher moral ethic, doing the right thing even if it means circumventing neutrality laws and bending regulations.
4. A film about the Flying Tigers would illustrate the ingenuity and adaptability of American culture and fighting spirit in a hostile environment.
5. The story of the American Flying Tigers is an important part of America's oral tradition and history. Most Americans living today have no idea of who the Flying Tigers were. If most Americans were taught as I was growing up as a child, they would probably think the Flying Tigers were Army Air Corps pilots flying airplanes in China with tiger shark faces on the noses of the airplanes. The Flying Tigers were far more than that and were not that at all. Stripped of their military identities, they were flying for the Chinese Air Force in the employ of a Chinese corporation. They were America's first covert air force, the predecessor of Air America. Madame Chiang Kai-shek wrote on Gen. Chennault's discharge from the Chinese Air Force that he "accomplished the impossible."

Americans in a movie theater today, being introduced to these fighting men and women who accomplished the impossible, will experience a renewed sense of pride and self-confidence. Although bloody and ugly, the focus of this film should be inspirational to afford the American people the opportunity to view themselves as the champion of the underdog who will fight for what is right and intervene (even if by evading neutrality laws) to ensure that the bully (Japan) does not destroy the underdog (China). This film can portray Americans and the American spirit, which includes elements of greatness and adventure. As *The Last Emperor* allowed Americans to experience the bizarre and surreal conditions of China, this film will also provide that experience, but in the context of an action-packed motion picture featuring characters who are larger than life.

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