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Flying Tiger, Black Sheep: Legends in the Pacific

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Abbreviations

1 st Lt.	First Lieutenant
AAC	Army Air Corps
AAF	Army Air Forces
ACTS	Air Corps Tactical School
AFB	Air Force Base
AFHRA	Air Force Historical Research Agency
ASC	Air Signal Group
AVG	American Volunteer Group
Brig. Gen.	Brigadier General
CAF	Chinese Air Force
CAMCO	Central Aircraft Manufacturing Company
CATF	China Air Task Force
CNAC	China National Aviation Corps
Col.	Colonel
CWAC	Curtiss-Wright Aircraft Company
FDR	Franklin Delano Roosevelt
JAF	Japanese Air Force

LSU	Louisiana State University
MAG	Marine Air Group
MCAS	Marine Corps Air Station
MIA	Missing in Action
NAS	Naval Air Station
OCMH	Office of the Chief of Military History
OTS	Officers' Training School
POW	Prisoner of War
RAF	Royal Air Force
ROTC	Reserved Officer Training Corps
R & R	Rest and Relaxation
SAAS	School of Advanced Airpower Studies
SBD	Scout Bomber Douglas
USAAF	United States Army Air Force
USAF	United States Air Force
VF	Marine Fighting Squadron
VMF	Fixed-Wing Marine Fighter
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

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~Dedicated to the memory of the Flying Tigers and the Black Sheep Squadron.~

"It is possible for men to fight against great odds and win."

~ Claire Lee Chennault

Abstract:

This project seeks to explore the relationship between Claire Lee Chennault and Gregory “Pappy” Boyington and their respective units. By carefully studying Claire Chennault and Gregory Boyington and the strategies they implemented within their units for missions one can better understand what made their units so successful. By extension, this project also seeks to understand how popular culture has continued to bring their stories to the forefront for a new generation and the influence it has in expanding the legends. By examining personality traits, leadership skills, and the command policies of the commanders outside of missions, it is hopeful that serious consideration will demonstrate what made these units inspiring for generations. Chennault and his American Volunteer Group (AVG) Flying Tigers entered the war against Japan long before Pearl Harbor but were the morale booster that Americans needed when December 7, 1941, occurred. Gregory Boyington and his Black Sheep squadron carried out what some might consider the improbable with just twenty-six pilots and fifteen planes. They achieved ninety-four confirmed enemy kills plus equal probable kills along with land-based destruction. In World War II, the leadership and dedication of Claire Lee Chennault and Gregory Boyington propelled their units into the history books as two of the most significant aviation units of the War in the Pacific.

Introduction: Into the Wild Blue Yonder

Military Historian Ronald H. Spector, a professor of history at George Washington University, in his essay “An Improbable Success Story: Official Military Histories in the Twentieth Century” explains that “the military takes history seriously, not as an intellectual pursuit, but as the root of all professional knowledge, the compendium of all reliable professional experience.”¹ Out of appreciation for the military histories, Spector emphasizes that for the military professionals, their histories are vital to the continuance of the mission. These histories are not abstract, but rather something they can utilize in the then and now. Today, professional historians are incorporating many of the older military histories they once believed to be too biased and uneven into their research by recognizing the value of the first-hand knowledge they provide. It is through the understanding of the value placed on these histories that one can carefully interpret them for a broader understanding of World War II.

World War II encompassed more than just the European theater. In China since 1937, Claire Lee Chennault, a former pilot and newly retired from the Army Air Corps (AAC), trained the Chinese Air Force (CAF) to defend itself against the advances of Japan. In mid-1941, young men from the United States resigned their positions in the reserves and quickly volunteered to head to China to help Chennault and the Chinese.² The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on

¹ Ronald H. Spector "An Improbable Success Story: Official Military Histories in the Twentieth Century." *The Public Historian* 12, no. 1 (1990): 27.

² This is in stark contrast to the Eagle Squadrons in Europe for several reasons. First, the Eagle Squadrons did not pay the men per kill, instead they received the monthly salary that a second lieutenant in the Royal Air Force received. Second, they were willing to accept applications from those rejected by the Army Air Corps. Third, the Eagle Squadrons had closer to 300 pilots flying in Europe. Fourth, they did not have the tacit approval from the White House that the Flying Tigers received. See for more information: William Wolf, "The King's Own: Long Before the United States Entered the War, Gutsy American Fliers Battled the Luftwaffe as Members of Britain's Eagle Squadron." *America in WWII*, August 2006, 46+. *Academic OneFile* (accessed May 12, 2019). http://link.galegroup.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/A401215999/AONE?u=vic_liberty&sid=AONE&xid=fb534faa

December 7, 1941, resulting in the two countries declaring war on each other. Chennault's volunteer group led the charge against the Japanese, giving America a much-needed morale boost at a time when the war was not going so well. Gregory Boyington, a Naval Aviator, served as a member of Chennault's unit until he resigned to go back to the Marines. Back in the Marines, Boyington ended up in the Solomon Islands, where he would eventually create a group of pilots under Fixed Wing Fighter (VMF)-214. The Black Sheep Squadron, as they came to call themselves, quickly established themselves as a top-notch unit. Using the very tactics that Chennault drilled into his Flying Tigers, Boyington led his men to create an impressive record. Histories kept by men of the unit, help provide valuable insight into training, daily routines, official missions, and the outcomes of those missions. It is through this valuable information that historians can piece together their roles in World War II.

While origins of the war commanded the most attention for the post-WWII generation, historians also examined various theaters of operation and new methods of warfare, especially aerial combat. Knowing and understanding how the Army Air Corps went from the initial pursuit-defense theory to advocating a bomber-first strategy, allowed historians to understand the frustration Chennault expressed for the military's lack of willingness to consider his argument for pursuit theory. This frustration is what drove him to China, where he could and would prove his thesis. The historical division of the Army Air Forces began at the direction of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1942.³

³ Royce L. Thompson, *Establishment of the War Department Historical Program for World War II*, (Fort McNair, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1947). Thompson's file at the U.S. Army Center of Military History has the memo containing the directive from President Roosevelt to the Bureau of the Budget in which he request that they keep an accurate and objective account of each service branch's experience in the war.

Between 1948 and 1958, Lieutenant Colonel Wesley Frank Craven and Major James Lea Cate edited seven volumes of Army Air Force history. One such volume was *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, in which the primary emphasis was the strategic bombing campaigns. They emphasized the strategic bombing campaign effort “because of a widely-shared belief in bombardment’s contribution to victory, but also because of its importance in establishing the United States Air Forces as a military service independent of the Army.”⁴ In recent military scholarship, leading scholars Colonel Phillip Meilinger, Air Force historian Daniel Mortensen, and Retired Lieutenant Colonel James Tate offer concise and technical histories of the Army Air Corps in World War II into the 21st century.⁵ While other historians, including World War II Historical Officer of the Army Air Forces (AAF) Tactical Center Robert Futrell, offer an insight into the various doctrines employed by the Army Air Corps.

In the early years of military aviation, air power did not exist as a stand-alone entity. It was part of the Army known as the Army Air Corps. While post-WWII historians often analyzed the role of air power in the war, scholarly attention predated the war and the development of the American Air Force. One of the first to write about airpower theory was William “Billy” Mitchell. As the leading American air theorist before World War II, in *Our Air Force: The Keystone of National Defense* (1923), the first of three major books on airpower, he theorized that airpower would one day take its place alongside other military services.

⁴ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), iii-iv.

⁵ Phillip Meilinger, Daniel Mortensen and James Tate’s histories will be discussed in further detail in another section of this paper. For now, it is important to know that they are part of the leading military scholars of what was the Army Air Corps and early years of the Air Force as a separate stand-alone service.

As an air commander, Mitchell knew what airpower was capable of and saw that it could be a significant contributor to land and sea campaigns. In his next book, *Winged Defense: The Development and Possibilities of Modern Air Power- Economic and Military*, which he wrote in 1925, Mitchell vehemently defended the potential of an independent Air Force built around strategic bombing in contrast to the Army's and Navy's views of the function of the Air Corps as an extension of the Army. It is vital to the history of the Air Force that after this book's release, Mitchell was willing to stand his ground that airpower had its place in the military. Speaking out that the Army and Navy had subverted its improvements and training, he was court-martialed.⁶

In 1935, Chennault took it upon himself to write a monograph entitled *Role of Defensive Pursuit*, in which he argued in favor of the role of the air pursuit as a means of defense. Whereas Mitchell advocated for a bomber-first Air Corps, Chennault advocated the importance of fighters. Chennault believed that pursuit could be used to attack incoming enemy planes if given enough advanced warning. Interestingly enough, he brought to light that the next great war would not just encompass the "military machine; soldiers, sailors, guns and ships alone could not win the war," and he predicted that "all classes of the population will have both a direct interest and personal concern in the prosecution of the war. Wealth and industrial facilities, as well as human material, will be drafted."⁷ He continued with his persuasive argument that the war would ultimately be a war of resistance, and not easily won in the traditional land battles. Chennault envisioned that the next great war would utilize not just the military but civilians as well, and as such fighters would provide the means of protecting areas under attack.

⁶ Fred L. Borch, III. "The trial by court-martial of Colonel William 'Billy' Mitchell," *Army Lawyer*, (January 2012): 2-3.

⁷ Claire Lee Chennault, *Role of Defensive Pursuit*, (Publisher N.P., 1935): 2-3.

The heart of his monograph goes to the subject of air power and how military leaders and politicians must recognize its importance in any future wars. He stressed his belief that belligerent powers would use air power early in the next war, and he questioned whether ariel bombardment, which he considered offensive in nature, or defensive fighter measures would define victory. Ultimately, Chennault attacked the bombardment theory, first defined by Italian general and air-power theorist Giulio Douhet and championed by General Mitchell, as a primary source of securing victory, saying that there were limits to how and where the heavy bombers could operate. According to Mitchell, “Bombardment aviation is that branch which is designed to carry heavy aerial projectiles over enemy targets, and drop them on these places with a view to destroying the material and killing the personnel.”⁸ Chennault argued that fighters had more mobility and with new technological developments in weapons, such as the .50 caliber machine gun, have the opportunity to take down and destroy heavy bombers before they reached their target. He also contended that fighter planes were a more cost-effective option. The government could produce four-to-five of them for the price of a single bomber. Finally, he asserted that fighters in defensive pursuit would be most effective if an early warning system was in place and adequately utilized. Though valid, his arguments angered his superiors, who were more inclined to lean toward the European way and placed emphasis on a bomber-first theory.

The first significant postwar treatment of air power was former United States Air Force (USAF) Historical Division member and professor of Humanities at Michigan State University Thomas H. Greer’s *The Development of Air Doctrine in the Army Air Arm, 1917-1941* (1955). Looking at the various air theories taught at Air Command Tactical School (ACTS), focusing

⁸ William Mitchell, *Our Air Force: The Keystone of National Defense*, (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1921), 55.

primarily on bomber strategy, Greer indicates that General Henry “Hap” Arnold, a founding father of the Air Force, considered did take into consideration pursuit theory but ultimately went with the bomber-first strategy.⁹ Pursuit theory and the lack of support is what drove Chennault into retiring from the Army and accepting the position as an adviser in China. As Greer explains in a brief section of his monograph, it is the loss of bombers in Europe that ultimately led Arnold to consider seriously what Chennault pushed all along.

In *The Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Airpower Theory* (1989), a compilation of essays edited by Colonel Phillip Meilinger for the School of Advanced Airpower Studies (SAAS) the traditional military school of thought prevails. The essays examine the early thoughts of Giulio Douhet and William “Billy” Mitchell through more advanced airpower theories. Another history and quite possibly the best is World War II Historical Officer of the AAF Tactical Center Robert Frank Futrell’s *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine: Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force* (1989), a two-volume military history that looks at the early development of air power from “1903 with the first heavier than air flight ending in 1984.”¹⁰ Of particular interest is the chapter “Air Force Thinking and World War II” that focuses on the theory during World War II, where doctrinally the Army Air Corps placed more emphasis on a bomber-first strategy.¹¹

⁹ General Henry “Hap” Arnold believed that the capabilities of the bomber would better suit the needs of a war time military. See for more information Henry H. Arnold, *American Airpower Comes of Age: General Henry H. "Hap" Arnolds World War II Diaries*, ed. John W. Huston (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 2002), 59.

¹⁰ Robert Frank Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine: Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force*, 2 vols. (Maxwell AFB: Ala: Air University Press, 1989): xi. Futrell’s work is a strong technical military history that examines the logic behind why in the early 1940s and 1950s that there was no written doctrine for the Air Force, concluding that the many of the prevailing generals of the time felt that doctrine evolved far too often that any written doctrine was a waste of time.

There are of course military histories that emphasize the various theories of air power, with the vast majority of them coming out of the classrooms of Air University at Maxwell Air Force Base. These texts are strictly traditional military histories and briefly address the roles that Claire Chennault played in forming the early years of American Air Power. Works such as Colonel Phillip Meilinger's *Bomber: The Formation and Early Years of Strategic Air Command* (2012), focuses primarily on the bomber's formation and the bomber-first strategy. Meilinger does briefly address Chennault's opposition to such an emphasis and Chennault's argument in the early years that fighter pursuit could be a valuable asset to the military if it were employed correctly. However, because of his strong views and obsessive attitude, Chennault alienated his superiors.

The Flying Tigers, and later Boyington and his Black Sheep were the beneficiaries of Chennault's persistence in the role of defensive-pursuit. Utilizing the CAF as a means of testing the viability of the theory, he was able to produce a coherent strategy that he imparted to the Flying Tigers. Boyington, as a member of the Flying Tigers, benefitted from this instruction, and when the time came, he taught his unit what he had learned from Chennault. Both units employed Chennault's theories first over the skies of China and then over Rabaul in the South Pacific with remarkable success. Their success proved that Chennault's theories were not as obsolete as the military believed.

When considering the histories of these two highly decorated and successful units during the war in the Pacific, it is worth noting that in the years immediately following the war that few

¹¹ The emphasis of bombers could lie in the fact that they could carry bombs resulting in more damage for less work, whereas, the fighters of the time only had the ability of limited small bombs if they had the capability at all. Most were planes equipped with machine guns and were meant for air-to-air combat, as opposed to the bomber that could attack the ground sufficiently.

scholarly approaches emerged. Its histories are all official military histories, written by airmen, often to the disparagement of traditional historians, who felt that these histories were nothing more than after-action reports with the exception of possibly journalist Russell Whelan.¹² Starting as early as 1942, authors have been writing books and articles about the exploits of the Flying Tigers and the Black Sheep Squadron. However, as author Colonel Phillip Meilinger has pointed out in his historiographical treatment, *Airmen and Air Theory: A Review of the Sources*, most authors have neglected to focus on serious scholarship that details why these units were so successful. The vast majority of authors have often paid more attention to the missions in comparison to the leaders themselves and what it took for these leaders to mold the men into the high flying heroes that captivated the imaginations of many around the world.

Journalist Russell Whelan's *The Flying Tigers* (1943) starts the first of many war propaganda writings. The idea was to tell the story of the AVG, pilots who resigned their commissions in the United States Military and voluntarily left their country to aid China in their defense against Japan. The AVG was in operation long before Pearl Harbor, and to share their victories with the American people back home in hopes of boosting morale at a time when it was sorely needed, Whelan decides to write the story of how these men had been taking on the Japanese and winning. As Whelan puts it, "But the true gold of their achievement lies hidden in the imponderables of the human spirit: the effect upon the long-beleaguered and unaided Chinese; the inspiration to America, suddenly plunged into a worldwide war."¹³ Whelan's

¹² Ronald H. Spector, "An Improbably Success Story: Official Military Histories in the Twentieth Century," *The Public Historian* 12, no. 1 (1990): 25-26.

¹³ Russell Whelan, *The Flying Tigers: The Story of the American Volunteer Group*, (New York: Warner, 1943): 212.

interpretation of the AVG is one of hope and success in what was to become a deadly war against Japan.

Duane Schultz, a former professor of psychology with a passion for military history, wrote *The Maverick War: Chennault and the Flying Tigers* (1990). Drawing from mostly unpublished diaries, personally conducted interviews, and Chennault's memoirs, Schultz retells the story of the AVG in China in a way that details just how maverick this unit truly was. In his coverage of the unit from its early formation until Chennault's death, Schultz's account reads more like a psychological journey of a man who sets out to prove a point and win the respect of those around him. To prove this theory, he closes the book by writing "He had fought hard for the tributes he finally received at Arlington, the respect, adulation, and love of those who had served with him, and the thanks of a grateful nation. Nothing had come easy for Chennault. But, he had won."¹⁴ Phillip Meilinger labeled Schultz's work as just "slightly higher caliber" from that of war propaganda.¹⁵

During the late 1990s, there was a slight shift in the retelling of the history of the Flying Tigers from war propaganda to more of military history-- one that is often riddled with holes in scholarship, adding very little to the enveloping larger story. Daniel Ford, military historian, journalist, and prolific AVG chronicler, draws on his ability to access archival documents and diaries from the unit in his *Flying Tigers: Claire Chennault and His American Volunteers, 1941-1942*, originally published in 1991 through the Smithsonian Institute. Ford tends to glorify Chennault while attempting to discredit those who disagreed with him and his theories. As an

¹⁴ Duane P. Schultz, *The Maverick War: Chennault and the Flying Tigers*, (New York: St. Martins Press, 1990): 315.

¹⁵ Phillip S. Meilinger, *Airmen and Air Theory: A Review of the Sources*, (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University, 2011): 28.

archivist at the Smithsonian, Ford's access to previously classified documents that detailed more about the early years of the AVG should have allowed him to better document not just the military side of the story but also the political. However, what he winds up doing is further padding the glorification of a somewhat bull-headed Chennault.

Jerome Klinkowitz's, professor of English and University Distinguished Scholar at the University of Northern Iowa, *With the Tigers Over China, 1941-1942* (1999) draws on the remembrances and writings of the men who flew with Chennault as part of the AVG. In it, he brings out a critical argument that many historians have not pondered beforehand. Did the war truly start for the Far East, in 1937 or was it 1931? Klinkowitz's argument stands on the issue that if the war in the Far East started in either of these two years, then it stands to reasons that the Far East is also the first theater of combat in World War II. His logic is based on the fact that Chennault was in China for four years before the bombing of Pearl Harbor to aid the Chinese military in fending off the Japanese. This action had the tacit approval of the President of the United States, and it involved a group of American volunteer pilots, which leads Klinkowitz to dub it the "war that wasn't first."¹⁶ His history of the AVG is drawn more from the thoughts and feelings of the men who were in China during these early years when they were hard at battle with limited supplies, planes that were often ill-equipped or up to standards, and isolated from the rest of the world. However, once again as with previous histories written about Chennault and the AVG Flying Tigers, while Klinkowitz does add this interesting perspective that no other historian had touched upon, he fails to consider more than just mission-oriented military history.

¹⁶ Jerome Klinkowitz, *With the Tigers Over China, 1941-1942*, (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1999): 2.

Adding another voice to the countless works available on the Flying Tigers comes the book by AVG member Lewis (Lew) Sherman Bishop and his daughter Sheila Bishop Irwin titled *Escape from Hell: An AVG Flying Tiger's Journey* (2004). Sheila Bishop Irwin takes her father's written words to make up three chapters of this book, in which he details his last mission, the subsequent shooting down of his plane, and his capture by the Japanese. Through detailed research and conversations with members of her dad's unit, she ties together a beautifully written story about the Flying Tigers and her father in the remainder of the book. Included in this work are copies of an original Central Aircraft Manufacturing Company (CAMCO) contract and multiple newspaper clippings of her father's capture.

A brief monograph by former U.S. Foreign Officer to Thailand Bob Bergin entitled *The Unhappy Tiger: Gregory Boyington's Brief Career As An AVG Flying Tiger* (2012) is one of many short monographs published by Banana Tree Publishing about the members of the AVG. This particular one focuses on Gregory Boyington's exploits and unhappy tenure with the AVG. In it, he details how the men in his unit were not impressed with Boyington, and the fact that he was drunk on several occasions, including just before heading out on flight missions. Whatever the issue, Boyington was not impressed with the AVG, he was not the hot shot that he would later become with the Black Sheep, and Bergin does an excellent job in the few brief pages to convey this information.

Another excellent source of material on the Flying Tigers comes from Olga Greenlaw's memoir, edited by journalist-turned-military historian and avid AVG chronicler Daniel Ford. Olga Greenlaw was the wife of AVG Executive Officer Harvey Greenlaw. In *The Lady and the Tigers: The Story of the Remarkable Woman Who Served With the American Volunteer Group in Burma and China, 1941-1942*, Olga tells the story of the AVG unit, in what Daniel Ford declares

is probably some of the best resource material he has encountered. Olga had a unique position as being only one of two women officially among the AVG, and it is said that she knew most of the men of the unit very intimately, something she hints at in her memoir. Greenlaw was one of the few in China that Gregory Boyington was close to during his time as a member of the AVG. The fact that something this detailed survives with some additional material added by Ford after interviews with Greenlaw provides an insightful perspective into the AVG.

Retired Lieutenant Colonel (Lt. Col.) Braxton Eisel continues the traditional military history with his work, *The Flying Tigers: Chennault's American Volunteer Group in China* (2013) to honor the 60th Anniversary of the founding of the Air Force. It is a short history of the AVG that looks back on their formidable leader's background and his formation of the AVG. Eisel briefly addresses the concern of the Royal Air Force (RAF) troops in the region and how ill-prepared they were for the coming war with Japan. The absorption of the AVG into the AAC as a concern of the men needed further exploration. However, Eisel only briefly covers this issue. Adding nothing substantially new, Eisel does, however, give credit where credit is due to the brave men of the AVG while looking towards the future of the current unit.

More recent scholarship from lawyer Samuel Kleiner (2018), who holds a doctorate in international relations from the University of Oxford, addresses not only the missions but the political and diplomatic as well as personal histories of the AVG Flying Tigers that have gone previously unnoticed. His thesis argues that “years before American soldiers stormed the beaches of Normandy or raised the flag on Iwo Jima, it was Chennault's Flying Tigers who rallied the country with victories when the Axis forces appeared unstoppable.”¹⁷ Kleiner distinguishes his

¹⁷ Samuel Kleiner, *The Flying Tigers: The Untold Story of the American Pilots Who Waged a Secret War against Japan*, (New York, NY: Viking, 2018): 3.

history by adding to the story of the AVG Flying Tigers from 1937-1938, when Chennault and his men were first training the CAF. He also includes coverage of the Rape of Nanking and the eventual use of American pilots freelancing with the CAF. Most significantly, he addresses that five decades after the fact, the Pentagon finally acknowledged the truth about the AVG-- that it was indeed an authorized operation from the highest level.

The histories of the Black Sheep Squadron are military histories, with the vast majority of them being written solely by one major historian; Bruce Gamble. In *The Black Sheep: The Definitive Account of Marine Fighting Squadron 214 in World War II*, Gamble spent many years researching, interviewing and combing through thousands of documents both official and unofficial about the unit. He also spent many years cultivating personal relationships with the men. Using their diaries and unit files in the National Archives as well as the National Naval Aviation Museum, he compiled histories that span five books, three of which focus on the primary mission of the unit at Rabaul.

Once They Were Eagles: The Men of the Black Sheep Squadron written by the unit's Intelligence Officer, Frank Walton, is the most detailed military history of the unit. Walton's job entailed keeping detailed records of every mission before take-off and the after-action reports. The book is based solely on the after-action reports of the various missions the men flew in their four-month tour of the Far East from September 1942 to January 1943, when the unit breaks up with the listing of Boyington as Missing in Action (MIA). In true military fashion, the after-action reports are the key to building the story, and Walton with his penchant for meticulous, detailed reports is capable of retelling the actual story. The after-action reports contain every critical detail, from the number of men who flew the mission of the day to kill shots acquired by the pilots.

The most notorious scholarship written about the Black Sheep Squadron comes from Gregory Boyington. While he claims it is the true story of the unit, many of his men claim he sensationalized the story to be more enticing to the average reader or even Hollywood. It does, however, contain some modicum of truth to it. Boyington claimed to do his best to be honest about what occurred during his tenure as leader of the unit. However, it is often challenging to distinguish embellishment from the truth. What he does add to the historiography of the unit is an in-depth look at himself, his early years growing up, and his early career in the Marines along with the mistakes he made that led him to join the AVG Flying Tigers. It is probable that had he never joined the AVG Flying Tigers and learned from Chennault's example that Boyington might never have emerged as a legendary leader.

Far too often as traditional military histories have demonstrated, they are mission-based narratives, or stand on the extreme side of war propaganda that glorifies and justifies the actions undertaken by each unit. No historian has yet to consider these actions as more than military after-action reports or explored the doctrine behind the success of each unit. To better understand the legendary status of the Flying Tigers and the Black Sheep, it is necessary to include not just the results of the units but also the responses it elicited from the American people. Using oral histories, newspaper clippings, archival material from locations such as the National Archives, the National Naval Aviation Museum, and the Air Force Historical Research Agency, it is hopeful that new information can shed more light into the men's perspective of their leaders and the doctrines they used to win battles. Through this new information, one can better understand how their doctrines continue to influence a new generation of military aviators and commanders.

Another consideration that needs exploring is how pop culture has made these units so legendary. Popular culture does have an impact on sustaining the stories throughout history for

generations who may never pick up a book. Through avenues such as movies, television shows, comics, and video games, history can influence generations as they bring their stories to life. Historians are generally hopeful that by introducing the public to courageous stories through various media forms that it will prompt some to want to search out more information about the subject matter. Unfortunately, in a time when social media plays such a significant role in our daily lives, individuals often get their news or find supposed history groups online and far too often take it at face value that the stories they are reading are accurate. Therefore, it is pertinent that historians understand how influential these avenues are on current generations and if they will continue to play a role for generations to come.

The first chapter of this work looks to explore more in-depth the backgrounds such as training and early assignments that helped prepare Chennault and Boyington for the roles that would secure their spots in history. This chapter will examine where they earned their wings, the units that they served with that helped prepare them for leadership roles that catapulted them into history, and any outside education that may have aided them in their military career. Understanding where these men came from, their backgrounds in education, and the units that groomed them for their future roles are critical to understanding who they were as not just leaders but also as pilots. It will be during these formative years in the military that they will get their footing and the experiences that enabled them to prepare for the future.

The second chapter will take an in-depth look at Chennault and the Flying Tigers. As with all stories, there must be a starting point, and for the Flying Tigers, their story starts with Chennault's arrival in China. The aims and goals of this chapter are the explorations of those early days when Chennault acted as an adviser to General Chiang and the CAF and his abject horror over the conditions of their aviation units leading to the formation of the Flying Tigers.

Furthermore, it will explore the activation of the AVG in the later part of 1941, their record over the Burma Road, and their eventual absorption into the AAF. Utilizing oral histories and newspaper clippings from their time will provide ample material to better understand the conditions the men faced in terms of supplies and the necessary equipment to keep their planes in the air. It will also explore the tactics and strategies implemented by Chennault including the early warning system he placed to provide ample notice of impending attacks. Finally this chapter will also examine the influence that Chennault had on Boyington during his days as a member of the Flying Tigers. It will explore Boyington's time in the unit and his performance as an aviator. It is vital to understand why Boyington, who despised Chennault as much as he did, would later emulate the man he called his nemesis. It is because of this emulation that Boyington leads his Black Sheep Squadron to such an impressive record.

A third chapter will explore the Black Sheep Squadron under the command of Gregory Boyington. The chapter seeks to examine Boyington's resignation from the Flying Tigers and his return to the United States and request for re-enlistment into the Marines. It further examines the events leading up to his creation of the unit and the record they established as a leading Marine aviation unit in the Pacific. Other factors explored in this chapter are the tactics and strategies Boyington implemented. Through oral histories, the men of the Black Sheep Squadron give a glimpse into the training he provided that aided in their ability to overcome the enemy in the air. The chapter also seeks to correct the assumption that the squadron was a group of misfits, when in reality they were a group of replacement pilots in need of a squadron who accomplished much with so little.

The fourth chapter seeks to understand how history and memory impact legacy.

Furthermore, the chapter aims to examine how multimedia influences the way people are

exposed to historical events. Popular culture continues to have a role in the way many view history. The stories of the Flying Tigers and the Black Sheep Squadron are no exception. Movies about the AVG Flying Tigers started appearing before the war had even ended. In the 1970s, Boyington's Black Sheep Squadron was brought to life on NBC for millions of viewers each week. It is hopeful that by understanding how Hollywood took these stories and turned them into feature films and television programming, one can understand how influential they were on a new generation of military aviators. Additionally, another avenue of exploration in the chapter lies within the continuation of the units into today. Though the Flying Tigers may have found themselves absorbed into the AAF to become the 23rd Fighter Group, the unit still proudly serves the nation today. Today's Black Sheep Squadron continues to uphold the legacy of doing whatever it takes to accomplish this mission.

This final chapter will tie everything together by looking at how each unit impacted not only their generation during a time when morale was sorely needing a boost when but also the legacy these units left for the men who come behind them. It will provide a final analysis as to whether or not Chennault and Boyington lived up to the standards created by the military at the time of what a leader should be, or whether they forged their path to create something entirely different but just as impactful and demanding on their men. Ultimately it will explain how and why the AVG Flying Tigers and the Black Sheep Squadron were so successful in completing the mission set before them.

Both Chennault and Boyington were mavericks and daredevils with a penchant for allowing troublesome behaviors within their units. However, once they were air bound their skills were unquestionably among some of the best in the Pacific. Combining the best of both worlds, leadership, tactical skills, and personalities that would jump off the silver screen, it is

these traits that they passed onto their men. The resulting high level of success left strong legacies for the men that would follow after them.

Chapter One: The Journey Begins

Growing up on a military base surrounded by the sounds of roaring jet engines taking off from the runway day and night, it is natural that one would develop a sense of appreciation and respect for the men and women who pilot those magnificent machines. Yearly air shows gave those living in the community the opportunity to visit the runways exploring the various aircraft. These events were open to the public and allowed the pilots to demonstrate their acrobatic flight skills. Inspiration also came for many in the form of the AVG Flying Tigers and the Black Sheep Squadron. Reading their stories in books, seeing movies, television shows, and documentaries on channels such as the History Channel has influenced many men in recent generations to see their own glory in the aviation squadrons of the Armed Forces.

Chennault and Boyington also found influence and inspiration from some of the earliest fliers and theorists of their time. For Chennault, it was a biplane exhibition at the 1910 Louisiana State Fair that sparked his desire to fly.¹⁸ Barnstormer Clyde Pangborn inspired Boyington during a chance meeting when he was just a boy.¹⁹ An understanding of the backgrounds Chennault and Boyington came from will help shed light onto what secured their place in history books as two of the greatest military aviators in the World War II era.

¹⁸ Claire Lee Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1949):10; Samuel Kleiner, *The Flying Tigers: The Untold Story of the American Pilots Who Waged a Secret War Against Japan*, (New York: Viking, 2018):7.

¹⁹ Bruce Gamble, *Black Sheep One: The Life of Gregory "Pappy" Boyington* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000), 17-24; Jessie Geissler, 1944, "Mother Tells Ace's Story," *Arizona Republic Sun* (Phoenix), January 9. Also see the "Man of the Week," *Detroit Free Press Sun* (Detroit) January 16; "Gregory Boyington, Co-Holder of Record for Shooting Down Enemy Planes, Had Lived Only to Fly," *Jackson Sun* (Jackson, TN), January 9; "Here's Story of Boyington, Top Marine Flier, Now Lost," *Tampa Tribune* (Tampa) January 9; Associated Press, 1944 "Boyington's Love of Planes Dates from Childhood," *Indianapolis Star* (Indianapolis), January 15.

Growing up in the backwoods of Louisiana, Claire Lee Chennault had a childhood of adventure. His mother died when he was five, leaving his father to raise him and his brother Bill.²⁰ Often alone for days at a time in the woods, Chennault would hunt, fish, and trap animals, learning to be self-reliant and independent. Exploring the wooded swamplands that surrounded the Chennault home, Claire often daydreamed about distant lands that he hoped to visit. Recalling that “like most young men, I was looking for bright new worlds to conquer, and as is the habit of youth, regretted that I had been born so late when all the most glamorous frontiers had disappeared.”²¹ Even though he struggled in school, he loved to read about ancient Greek and Roman wars from the books he found at the home of his grandparents. Having a passion for history and being enamored with the histories of men such as Robert E. Lee, Sam Houston, Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, Napoleon, and Genghis Khan, Chennault grew up wanting to be a soldier. Incidentally, two of the men he studied happened to be related to his family. On his father’s side, his family connected with Sam Houston, and his mother was related to Robert E. Lee.²²

The year 1909 was one of growth for Chennault. While attending Louisiana State University (LSU) as an agricultural major, he discovered the Reserved Officer Training Corps (ROTC), where he hoped to live up to the standards of being a soldier. For the most part,

²⁰ There is some conflicting information on the age Claire Lee was when his mother died. Samuel Kleiner and Claire Lee Chennault both contend that he was five years old, but, Wanda Cornelius claims he was eight. For more information see Claire Lee Chennault, *Way of a Fighter: The Memoirs of Claire Lee Chennault*, (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1949), 4; Wanda Cornelius and Thayne R. Short, *Ding Hao: America’s Air War in China, 1937-1945*, (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 1980), 19; Samuel Kleiner, *The Flying Tigers: The Untold Story of the American Pilots Who Waged a Secret War Against Japan*, (New York, NY: Viking, 2018).

²¹ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 7.

²² Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 2; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 19; Kleiner, *The Flying Tigers*, 6; William Smith, "Claire Lee Chennault: The Louisiana Years," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 29, no. 1 (1988), 50.

Chennault was a dedicated cadet. However, after failing to meet the academic standards and acquiring some forty demerits, he dropped out of LSU and returned home.²³ Chennault acquired the demerits on purpose. He figured that if he “timed his demerits in the corps and accumulated just enough to lead to his expulsion, he could get home in time to go after the fish” and return in the fall.²⁴ A visit to the 1910 Louisiana State Fair altered Chennault’s life forever when he witnessed a biplane in action. Joe Archibald, a freelance writer and World War I veteran, wrote that Chennault dreamed of flying from an early age, figuring it to be the last frontier.²⁵ Having decided that he wanted to be a military aviator, Chennault took the entrance exam to the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis. He had previously applied to both the Naval Academy and the United States Military Academy at West Point. Failing to finish the exam, he sent word to his father and returned home, where he resumed his studies at LSU.²⁶

Chennault moved on to Louisiana State Normal, finishing with a teacher’s certificate.²⁷ He then spent the next year teaching students not much younger than himself in a one-room classroom. For the next several years, Chennault moved from one job to another. Accepting work in positions such as school principal, The Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA)

²³Kleiner, *The Flying Tigers*, 6.

²⁴ Duane Schultz, *The Maverick War: Chennault and the Flying Tigers*, (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 25.

²⁵ According to Joe Archibald, Chennault’s interest in aviation pre-dates the 1910 Louisiana State Fair. He claims that Chennault and his father did not agree on the feasibility of the potential for man flying one day. Joe Archibald, *Commander of the Flying Tigers: Claire Lee Chennault*, (New York, NY: Julian Messner, 1966), 7-11.

²⁶ Chennault apparently was not enthusiastic about the prospect of being restricted to the campus for two years, especially since it was a bland environment, and he was accustomed to freely wandering. See Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 5; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 23; William Smith, "Claire Lee Chennault: The Louisiana Years," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 29, no. 1 (1988): 52.

²⁷ Louisiana State Normal is now known as Northwestern State University. See "About," Northwestern State University, January 1, 2016, accessed February 28, 2019, <https://www.nsula.edu/about-us/>.

director, and eventually ending up at a Goodyear Tire plant. Unfortunately, he lacked interest in the work he found, and he soon discovered the need to earn more money to support his expanding family.²⁸ When the United States entered World War I in 1917, Chennault applied for duty in the Air Corps. Captain Hamilton H. Salmon, Jr. rejected his application, writing, “applicant does not possess necessary qualifications for a successful aviator.”²⁹ He was rejected upon his first attempt as not being qualified based upon his lack of education. It was believed at the time by the military that only those who had obtained an Ivy League education were qualified to be pilots. He was, however, accepted into Officer Training School (OTS), where he trained to lead infantry divisions.³⁰ Chennault was twenty-six and the father of three at the time he accepted the offer for the OTS, where upon graduation he was assigned to Fort Travis in San Antonio, Texas, with the 90th Division.³¹

Chennault had not given up on his dream to fly. Stationed at Fort Travis, also known as Camp Travis in some official military records, he often made the trek across town to Kelly Field,

²⁸ Chennault’s many jobs during those years included: a position as a school principal, YMCA director in New Orleans, employment with Goodyear and eventually in 1916 he had relocated the family to Akron where he worked in a factory making tires in a war plant for the Allies. See for more information: Chennault, Claire L. *Application for Admission to Officer’s Training Camp*. Claire Lee Chennault’s Military Personnel File. National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 8; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 26-27.

²⁹ Captain H.H. Salmon, Jr. was the head of the Flying Section of the Signal Corps according to the *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, vol. 18.

³⁰ During this time for its part, the military viewed the best candidates for pilot training to be Ivy Leaguers. Those who were capable of being both an officer and a gentleman and Chennault was not a gentleman. Chennault enlisted at Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indiana on August 27, 1917. For more information see Chennault, Claire L. *Letters*. Claire Lee Chennault’s Military Personnel File. National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Samuel Kleiner’s *The Flying Tigers* (2018); Samuel Hynes, *The Unsubstantial Air: American Fliers in the First World War* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2014), 21; Claire Lee Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 7.

³¹ Here lies another conflicting issue. Per Chennault’s Official Military Record, it states that his first assignment was the 90th Division at Camp Travis, whereas, Cornelius and Short indicate that he was assigned to the 36th Texas Division. Thus far no research has prevailed showing whether the 36th Texas Division was assigned to the 90th Division and part of Camp Travis. See for more information: Chennault, Claire Lee, *Complete Military Record*, Claire Lee Chennault’s Military Personnel File. National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 25.

where he impressively convinced instructors to teach him to fly. At some point during the assignment to Fort Travis, a call went out for officers to transfer over to Kelly Field. During the next year, Chennault applied three more times to flight school, only to face rejection each time. However, due to the lack of regulations, Chennault took advantage and managed to talk some of the easier-going officers into teaching him the fundamentals of flying. He recalled in his memoir, *Way of a Fighter*, that Charley Leonard “soloed me unofficially,” while Lt. Ralph would taxi a plane onto the runway for him to fly anytime he wanted.³²

In 1917, Chennault obtained a position that put him in charge of the training planes. His responsibilities required that he “maintain a maximum amount of flying time for the field.”³³ To Chennault, this was the opening he sought, as he took those orders to mean that if a student pilot was not available, he was to take a plane out for a flight. In September 1918, Chennault received orders reassigning him to Langley Field in Hampton, Virginia, where an outbreak of influenza had left him in charge of a quarantined hangar of sick men.³⁴ Chennault was among those who fell ill with influenza, and many believed that he would not survive. He credited Lt. Ralph for

³² In all probability the Charley Leonard that Chennault is Charles Leonard Shaw who according to the “Who’s Who in American Aeronautics” was a training instructor at Kelly Field. Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 8; Lester Durand Gardner, “Who’s Who in American Aeronautics,” (New York, NY: The Gardner & Moffat Co, 1922), 91; Robert Muller, *Air Force Bases Vol. 1: Active Air Force Bases Within the United States of America on September 17, 1982*, (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1989), 80; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 25; Braxton Eisel, *The Flying Tigers: Chennault’s American Volunteer Group in China*, (U.S. Air Force, History Museum Program, 2013), 1-2; Keith Ayling, *Old Leatherface of the Flying Tigers: The Story of General Chennault*, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1945), 43; Kleiner, *The Flying Tigers*, 10.

³³ *Complete Military Record*, Claire Lee Chennault’s Military Personnel File. National Archives, Washington, D.C

³⁴ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 8; Kleiner, *The Flying Tigers*, 11.

saving his life by providing him a quart of “good bourbon,” which he used to recover, as was typical in the South to use for suppressing coughs and helping lung ailments.³⁵

In 1918, after accumulating around eighty hours of unofficial flying time, he finally earned a spot in the aviation training program and headed back to Kelly Field.³⁶ Assigned to Pop Liken, recalled as “as bullheaded and fiery tempered as myself,” Chennault almost did not graduate from aviation school.³⁷ However, when the Washout Board decided to put him under the direction of Ernest Allison, Chennault not only earned his pilot wings but also garnered a taste for acrobatic flying.³⁸ Chennault recalled that while Allison was extremely capable in the acrobatic, daredevil stunts, his instructor truly did not enjoy it as much as Chennault.

Chennault graduated with his coveted wings in the spring of 1919. However, in the spring of 1920, the peacetime Army discharged him as part of force reduction.³⁹ The desire to fly was so strong for him that on May 25, he applied for a regular commission in the Air Service and spent the summer waiting for word back home in Louisiana.⁴⁰ On September 26, 1920,

³⁵ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 9-10.

³⁶ *Special Orders No 247; Oath of Office*, Claire Lee Chennault’s Military Personnel File. National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 8; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 26-27; Kleiner, *The Flying Tigers*, 11.

³⁷ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 10; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 27.

³⁸ Chennault would again work with Ernest Allison in China. Allison had moved to China in 1929 as a pilot with the CNAC. In 1937, he became an adviser with Chennault to Madame Chiang Kai-Shek. See Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 10; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 50; Daniel Ford, *Flying Tigers: Claire Chennault and His American Volunteer Group, 1941-1942*, (Durham, NH: Warbird Books, 2016), 54; Kleiner, *The Flying Tigers*, 11; Smith, “Claire Lee Chennault,” 55.

³⁹ *Special Orders No 84-0; Report of Separation of Officer from Service, April 16, 1920*, Claire Lee Chennault’s Military Personnel File, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 11; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 27.

⁴⁰ *Letter to Adjunct Officer, May 25, 1920; Report of Personal Examination of Candidate for Appointment, July 27, 1920*, Claire Lee Chennault’s Military Personnel File. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Chennault was officially put on Active Duty with a regular 1st Lt. commission, though it would not be to fly. Instead, he would spend the next year as the post's quartermaster.⁴¹

In the fall of 1922, after having completed fighter pilot training, Chennault was one of the first officers enlisted into what would become the Army Air Forces, and he was assigned to the 94th Fighter Squadron led by World War I ace, Frank Hunter.⁴² Created in 1917 as the 94th Aero Squadron, it became the 94th Pursuit in 1921.⁴³ The unit was one of legends. Having a recognizable emblem, the "Hat in the Ring," it was the World War I home of notable aces Eddie Rickenbacker and Douglas Campbell. In this squadron, he spent his days patrolling the Texas border along the Rio Grande. It was also during this time that he realized that the current tactics and strategies of the fighter pilot seemed wrong to him. To Chennault, the training he received was far too much like medieval jousting, and his training did not place enough emphasis on the "cold, cruel business of war."⁴⁴ With this in mind, he began to formulate the strategy that he would eventually utilize with the AVG in China.⁴⁵ The strategy involved implementing a maneuver known as the Immelmann. Named for German World War I ace, Max Immelmann, it

⁴¹ *Decision of Selecting Board September 10, 1920*, Claire Lee Chennault's Military Personnel File, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 11; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 27.

⁴² By the time he retired, Frank O. Hunter had achieved the rank of Major General. At the time he was in command of the 94th Squadron he was a World War I Ace having been credited with at eight German planes destroyed in combat. He was also the only living military member to have a military installation named for him. For more information on Major General Frank O. Hunter see "Namesake of Airfield was 'Swashbuckling' Ace." *Savannah Morning News*. May 9, 2015; "Maj. Gen. Frank Hunter Dies; Commanded Force In Europe." *New York Times*. June 27, 1982; "Major General Frank O. Hunter," U.S. Air Force, accessed February 15, 2019, <https://www.af.mil/About-Us/Biographies/Display/Article/108064/major-general-frank-o-hunter/>.

⁴³ "94 Fighter Squadron (ACC)," Air Force Historical Research Agency, July 22, 2010, accessed February 15, 2019, <https://www.afhra.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/432703/94-fighter-squadron-acc/>.

⁴⁴ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 11.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

involved pulling up in a “half loop with a rollout on top,” which allowed the pilot to move into a pursuit position.⁴⁶

In 1923, Chennault moved to Luke Field, Hawaii, where he recalled that some of the happiest times in his life took place. The weather was perfect, and it would be here during several Army-Navy exercises that he put his strategies into practice.⁴⁷ As Commander of the 19th FS the “Fighting Cocks,” Chennault’s first test of his theory came during an Army Artillery training exercise.⁴⁸ Chennault spent most of his days flying and exploring new tactics with his unit. When he was not antagonizing the Navy with his new ideas, he spent his days as a co-pilot in bombers that towed the targets used by the artillery units for target practice. During one of these mundane practice runs, Chennault and his fighter squadron decided to inject a taste of what war might be like by practicing dive-bombing tactics. Dive-bombing was the practice of diving directly at a target at low altitude before pulling away. He felt that to best prepare for war, one had to simulate the experience and not just practice shooting at slow moving targets. Chennault

⁴⁶ This maneuver would be the first of several strategies that Chennault would come to incorporate into his theory. See for more information Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 12; “Max Immelmann,” First World War.com - Weapons of War: Machine Guns, August 22, 2009, accessed February 28, 2019, <https://www.firstworldwar.com/bio/immelmann.htm>; Rodney Madison, “Immelmann, Max Franz,” In *The Encyclopedia of World War I: A Political, Social, and Military History*, edited by Spencer C. Tucker, 2nd ed. ABC-CLIO, 2005.

⁴⁷ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 12-13; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 31-32; Smith, “Claire Lee Chennault,” 55.

⁴⁸ As with the passing of time, memories often fade. Cornelius and Short wrote their history of Chennault and the Flying Tigers by primarily interviewing surviving members both of the AVG and of the 14th Air Force, the unit that would take on the Flying Tigers moniker. Because of this, there are some inconsistencies that vary such as the unit designation of the “Fighting Cocks.” Chennault and Smith both agree that it was the 19th, whereas Cornelius and Short have it listed as the 18th. To date no records have been found to indicate which is correct. Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 12; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 31; Smith, “Claire Lee Chennault,” 57.

recalled that he chased the Navy Commander up and down the beach angering him, which led to confinement to the base for a week.⁴⁹

His next opportunity to test his theories came in the 1925 joint exercise between the Army and the Navy. After several hours of conversation, Chennault convinced two of his most senior pilots to test a potential theory involving formation acrobatics that could be of use in a fighter situation.⁵⁰ To their surprise, it worked, and so they immediately began practicing in secret until they had it perfect. Once perfected, they demonstrated the formation tactic in a surprise show over the field.⁵¹ A perfect opportunity arose during the Army-Navy exercise to test this new formation tactic instead of the one-on-one dog-fight tactic that was the norm. The result was that the Navy was completely taken by surprise. The bombers believed that the fighter planes were too low to cause any serious interference, and so they continued to their intended target. However, the squadron pulled up, putting them on the bombers' tails. As Chennault recalled, "We opened throttles and ploughed through the Voughts without breaking formation. If the shooting had been for keeps, the Navy bombers would have been wiped out before they knew what hit them."⁵² They even managed to scare at least one bomber pilot, who broke formation.

⁴⁹ Chennault recalls in his memoir that he could clearly see the commander on the beach, but that the commander could not identify him, except to say that it was "that damned Frenchman with the big black mustache." Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 14-15; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 32.

⁵⁰ Formation Acrobatics also known as Formation Aerobatics is the type of flying that can be seen at airshows today by groups such as the USAF Thunderbirds and the Navy's Blue Angels. Involving loops, wingovers, spins, snap and slow rolls, and Immelmans as well as barrel rolls. It is a synchronized, tight formation often flown at high speeds at less than three feet apart. See, Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 25.

⁵¹ Chennault had formulated this plan since his days with the 94th FS, he believed that the tactics the Army Air Corp was using to be outdated and thus determined to find a more proactive tactic that would enable the fighters to better defeat the enemy. See Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 14-15.

⁵² Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 15.

Next came the opportunity to test his early-warning-system theory.⁵³ There was no warning system in place during this time, and Chennault believed that to be a mistake. It was his idea that by having an early-warning-system, it would allow the fighters to scramble quicker, thus potentially avoiding a complete catastrophe. He placed two men on top of a field water tower. Standing with their backs towards each other, they scanned the horizon with a pair of binoculars. Through this, the men were capable of seeing some four to six miles out, which allowed them to alert the base of incoming enemy planes, allowing the planes to get airborne to meet the incoming attack.⁵⁴ Chennault recalled the day before the exercise was scheduled to end, the spotters saw a single Navy plane coming in towards the field. Chennault scrambled, coming up on the plane's tail; it frightened the pilot so much that he put himself into a vertical dive that he could not pull out of, resulting in him crashing into the sea. The result was a very unhappy Navy that ultimately sent someone to take notes from Chennault on the new tactics.⁵⁵ Chennault would go on to write a new manual on fighter tactics.

When Chennault's time was done in Hawaii, he transferred back to Brooks Field in Texas. Here, he served as a flight instructor and eventually became director of flight training, where he advanced one of his new theories. This one involved paratroopers, but it was not an

⁵³ Chennault's warning system in China did not utilize radar. It was a system of observers stationed throughout China that when the sound of plane engines could be heard, the individual manning the station would call the next station and so forth until word was received at the main location where planes were readied for flight. There are similarities to the Dowding System of the RAF in Britain with the exception of the use of radar which Chennault did not have access to in China.

⁵⁴ Chennault believed that through utilizing an early warning system, it would enable the fighters to scramble in time to prevent a complete catastrophe. He would prove this theory in China with the AVG after discovering that the only advanced warning system was when the Royal Air Force flew above and to him that was not enough notice. See Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 15; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 33.

⁵⁵ Though the Navy took notice of this new idea, and though his manual was published, it would sit on a shelf getting dusty as the Army Air Corp paid it no attention. See Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 16; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 33; Smith, "Claire Lee Chennault," 58.

entirely new idea. Brigadier General (Brig. Gen.) Billy Mitchell had first suggested the idea of dropping men with parachutes out of planes over enemy positions and behind enemy lines.

Chennault and his team of Benjamin Chidlaw and Sgt. Nichols undertook the task of developing workable techniques.⁵⁶ This technique involved “a V formation of de Havilland two-seaters, each carrying one paratrooper in the rear cockpit.”⁵⁷ As commander, Chennault flew in the center of the formation in a Ford Trimotor. The plan was that as they flew over the target zone, the paratroopers would bail out along with supplies, ammunition, and guns. In less than a minute, Chennault recalled the men were on the ground and firing.⁵⁸ Chennault recalls in his memoir, “We polished this technique until the paratroopers were opening fire with machine guns in less than a minute after they landed.”⁵⁹ The demonstration made such noise that Major General Charles P. Summerall, who was the Army Chief of Staff, visited Brooks Field to see it in action. It also led to the first foreign invitation to Chennault. The Russians wanted Chennault to train their paratroopers.⁶⁰ He did not accept the offer, for he preferred to stay in the Air Corps.

⁵⁶ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 16; Phillip S. Meilinger, Col., "Billy Mitchell's Parachute Plan," *Air Force Magazine*, August 2014, 58.

⁵⁷ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 16.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶⁰ Major General Charles P. Summerall was critical of a potential Air Force, being an outspoken individual that the Air Corps fighter squadrons could be assembled quickly if needed as he testified at Billy Mitchell's court-martial. The Russians were the first foreign state to approach Chennault about training their military. They were highly interested in his paratrooper techniques and just like China would in the years to come, they offered to allow him to set the terms. Knowing he did not want to leave the U.S. Army Air Corps, Chennault recalls that he gave some outlandish terms and they accepted. He did not go to Russia. See Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 16-17; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 34-35; Rebecca Maksud, "The Billy Mitchell Court-Martial Courtroom Sketches from Aviation's Trial of the Century," *Air and Space Magazine*, July 2009; John T. Correll, "The Billy Mitchell Court-Martial," *Air Force Magazine*, August 2012, 64; John M. Kelly, *Claire Lee Chennault: Theorist and Campaign Planner*, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies United States Army Command and General Staff College, 1994), 4; Robert G. Davis, *HAP: Henry H. Arnold Military Aviator*, (Washington, D.C.: Air Force History and Museum Programs, 1997), 12.

In July 1929, Chennault received orders transferring him to Langley Field in Hampton, Virginia, for training at the Air Corps Tactical School.⁶¹ While in Virginia, he trained under Clayton Bissell, a World War I ace. According to Chennault, Bissell remained committed to the old tactics, still teaching fighter skills from 1918. Another concern for Chennault at this time was the fact that many in the Army Air Corps started believing that with the advances in bomber technology, fighter planes would be incapable of going against them.⁶² The bomber-first strategy went against everything that Chennault believed. In Chennault's opinion, if fighters stayed together in the air instead of going one on one with the enemy, they could win by overwhelming force.

The bomber-first strategy first came on the scene in a book by Italian General Giulio Douhet entitled *The War of 194-*. In it, he proposed that heavily armed bombers could fly to and from their intended targets with little to no interference. It did not hurt that the military had the new Martin B-10 bomber in production. When completed, it was to have five guns, the ability to achieve speeds up to 207 miles per hour, and the capacity to fly some 1,400 miles.⁶³ Douhet's influence, along with the new bomber, soon led some to view fighter planes as either obsolete, or at least approaching obsolescence.

⁶¹ Once again conflicting information, some of this could be a lapse in memory. The official records have Chennault ordered to ACTS in Langley for the 1929-1930 course, whereas Chennault says he at was the school in 1931 training under Clayton Bissell a name that will haunt him in 1942. See for more information *S.O. 169 July 19, 1929*, Claire Lee Chennault's Military Personnel File, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 20; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 36.

⁶² By 1929-1930, many of the older generation of Army Officers such as Billy Mitchell, Clayton Bissell, General Henry "Hap" Arnold were starting to champion a bomber first strategy. Originally, a theory of Italian General Giulio Douhet the American's were quick to pick up the theory and attempt to implement it. See for more information Phillip Meilinger, *The Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Airpower Theory*, (Maxwell AFB: Air University Press, 1997), 1; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 20; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 36; John M. Kelly, *Claire Lee Chennault*, 5; I.B. Holley Jr., *Ideas and Weapons*, (New York, NY: Yale University Press, 1953), 64.

⁶³ "Air Power Wonder": The B-10," Lockheed Martin, n.d., accessed February 18, 2019, <https://www.lockheedmartin.com/en-us/news/features/history/b-10.html>.

Furthermore, the Air Corps budget did not allow for expanding both the bomber and fighter sectors, and a decision on investing in one or the other seemed imminent. This new theory did not sit well with Chennault, who in a rebuttal wrote an eight-page thesis on the value of fighter planes, to which General Henry “Hap” Arnold replied, “Who is this damned fellow Chennault?”⁶⁴ His eight-page thesis included his argument regarding the need for an advanced warning system. Chennault voiced his opinion so loud and often that it triggered another field exercise. He recalled, “I talked so loud and so long about the necessity for an aircraft warning net, and radio intelligence to the defending fighters in the air, that another Air Force maneuver was held in 1933 at Fort Knox, Kentucky, two years after the Wright Field blindman’s-buff fiasco.”⁶⁵ This time, the bomber forces went unescorted by fighters, the defending fighters had no bombers, and an advanced warning net was allowed. The fighters had such tremendous success that it caused the bomber pilots to voice considerable displeasure with the apparent advantage.⁶⁶ Chennault considered it a success, and the result was the publication of his *The Role of Defensive Pursuit* in 1935.

⁶⁴ Chennault’s 8-page thesis has not been identified by title, nor is it in his military personnel file. If this could be found, it could open more avenues for understanding his belief in the fighter plane. General Arnold had conducted maneuvers on the Pacific Coast, ordering a squadron of B-10s to stimulate an attack on March Field in San Diego, California. The fighter planes on the base scrambled inefficiently causing Arnold to conclude that fighter planes would be ineffective during wartime. For more information see Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 22; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 38-41; Jack Samson, *The Flying Tiger: The True Story of General Claire Chennault and the U.S. 14th Air Force in China*, (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2012), 11; John Pomfret, *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom America and China, 1776 to the Present*, (New York: Picador Henry Holt and Company, 2017), 247; John T. Correll, “The Flying Tigers,” *Air Force Magazine*, December 2006, 37.

⁶⁵ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 22.

⁶⁶ The Wright Field blind-man’s bluff fiasco is a reference to a 1931 Air Corps maneuver that the First Fighter Group, commanded by Major Ralph Royce held. It was a test of a vague warning system of spotters to warn civilians to take cover instead of providing the defending fighters with needed intelligence so they could intercept the enemy. *Ibid.*, 23.

Chennault's next duty station was at Maxwell Field, where the Air Corps Tactical School had relocated. Here, Chennault instructed pilots in formation fighting "as the fundamentals of all fighter tactics."⁶⁷ Formation fighting required pilots to remain together in the formation for the concentration of firepower while also providing defense. The tactic stood in contrast to the one-on-one dogfighting that previously was commonly used. It would also be during his time at Maxwell that he would form an acrobatic group known as "Three Men on a Flying Trapeze." Under the direction of Commander Major General John F. Curry, who was the tactical school commandant, Chennault set out to select his team. Setting only one requirement, they had to be able to stay on his wing for up to thirty minutes of aggressive acrobatics.⁶⁸ With the selection of 2nd Lieutenant Haywood Hansell, Sergeant John H. Williamson, and Sergeant Billy McDonald, Chennault had his team. The men traveled across the country performing in air shows. Chennault believed that besides winning trophies and tantalizing spectators at air shows, they were proving that fighters could battle together in formation through some of the more aggressive tactics. Chinese General Mow Pang Tsu attended the last performance of the acrobatic group in Miami 1936. Impressed, he requested to speak to the men about coming to China to train the Chinese Air Force.⁶⁹

In late 1936, Williamson and McDonald left the service, and Chennault suggested that they take the offer to go to China to train pilots. Chennault's health soon started to fail him. An avid smoker, Chennault's habits left his lungs susceptible to bronchitis that left him in bed for

⁶⁷ Ibid., 25

⁶⁸ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 27; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 41; Ford, *Flying Tigers*, 5; Kleiner, *The Flying Tigers*, 13.

⁶⁹ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 29; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 41; Ford, *Flying Tigers*, 5; Kleiner, *The Flying Tigers*, 13; Kelly, *Claire Lee Chennault*, 5.

weeks at a time. His hearing verged on the point of being deaf due to flying, so the military suggested in February 1937 that he permanently retire.⁷⁰ Chennault had earned the ire of his superiors for years with his defensive-pursuit theories. His failing health now kept him from flying. He retired from the Army Air Corps on April 30, 1937, and left for China the next day. In a few short years, Gregory Boyington would find himself a member of the AVG under Chennault's command.

Born in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, in December 1912, Gregory "Pappy" Boyington did not always have the most comfortable childhood. His father walked out on him and his mother when he was approximately six months old. Charles Boyington was an abusive man who became even more violent when he was drunk. Accusing his wife of adultery and believing that Gregory was not his son, he soon abandoned them. The couple divorced officially in 1915.⁷¹ By this time, Grace Boyington was living with Ellsworth Hallenbeck in Spokane, Washington. Gregory was an adventurous little boy, having jumped out of not one but two windows by the time he was three years old. The second one resulted in his eye popping out of the socket. Thankfully there was no serious damage.

By 1917, the new little family of Ellsworth Hallenbeck, Grace Boyington and little Gregory were on the move again. This time he was moving to St. Maries, Idaho, where they would spend most of Gregory's childhood. With the birth of his younger brother William, Gregory gained the freedom to explore the world on his terms. With two of his friends, he roamed the little mill town that Ellsworth had moved them to, exploring the woods and nearby

⁷⁰ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 31; Ford, *Flying Tigers*, 146; Kleiner, *The Flying Tigers*, 19.

⁷¹ Bruce Gamble, *Black Sheep One: The Life of Gregory Pappy Boyington*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000), 8.

river.⁷² As Boyington recalled, “I seemed to have a penchant for climbing in high dangerous places, like the tallest trees that were available. Some of them I loved to climb especially well were situated right on the edge of a cliff, which made the height even more fantastic.”⁷³ A penchant for heights would one day launch Boyington into the skies above.

Ellsworth Hallenbeck fostered Boyington’s love of aviation. From the time he was just five years old, the two of them read stories together of daring pilots and their exploits in World War I. Among their favorites was Eddie Rickenbacker, World War I ace and race car driver.⁷⁴ It was also during this time that Boyington developed a passion for building model airplanes. When he was six years old, Clyde Pangborn, a flight student turned instructor in the Army came to town for a visit.⁷⁵ Flying a Curtiss JN-4, also known as a Jenny, Pangborn arrived in town in September 1919. Boyington heard the plane before he could see it and hurried off with a classmate to see the plane land.

Pangborn and his co-pilot belonged to a unique group of pilots known as barnstormers. Barnstormers were pilots who traveled across the country performing daredevil stunts mixed

⁷² Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 12.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷⁴ Eddie Rickenbacker would go on to score 26 victories in the air, leaving him to be the leading ace of World War I, a record that would stand until Major Joe Foss would tie that record in World War II with 26. Rickenbacker would also command the 94th Aero Squadron that Claire Lee Chennault would later be associated with during his peacetime commission in the Army. For more information see Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 16; "Capt. Edward V. Rickenbacker," National Museum of the USAF, April 09, 2015, , accessed February 18, 2019, <https://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/Visit/Museum-Exhibits/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/196753/capt-edward-v-rickenbacker/>.

⁷⁵ Clyde Pangborn, finished flight school to late to join the war, but he remained in Texas as a flight instructor, by spring of 1919 was associated with the Northwest Aircraft Company, was their first pilot, purchased a surplus Curtiss JN-4 2 seat biplane “Jenny”. “Barnstormer” named after the practice of Old World actors who staged their performances in the barns of consenting landowners. See for more information Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 25; "Clyde Edward Pangborn Collection," Washington State University, n.d., accessed February 18, 2019, <https://content.libraries.wsu.edu/digital/collection/pangborn>.

with acrobatic flying. Pangborn gave Boyington his first taste of flight for five dollars. Unfortunately, it was late, and he could not go up that day, but Pangborn promised to take him and his friend up the next day if they would throw flyers out of the plane inviting the local townsfolk to the show. Returning the next day, Pangborn kept his word and even offered to take the boys back up the next day if they would return and throw out more flyers. As his mother later recalled, flying “was the only thing that he would want to get up before breakfast for.”⁷⁶ Boyington was hooked from that day forward.

Boyington decided early in life that he wanted to be a military pilot. Inspired by both Pangborn and a beloved teacher’s husband, he worked hard at his studies. In late 1925, an Air Circus visited Spokane featuring the “largest gathering of airplanes ever to visit the region.”⁷⁷ Boyington and his friend, Johnny, hopped on a train bound for Spokane and attended the show. It would also be the first time he saw a plane crash and the pilot killed instantly.⁷⁸ However, this did not deter the determined Boyington.

His family moved in 1926 from St. Maries to Tacoma, Washington. According to Black Sheep Historian Bruce Gamble, the move might have been due to Ellsworth’s alcoholism as much as a potential job opportunity presented itself. Tacoma police in the 1920s era often looked the opposite direction of bootleggers, gambling rackets, brothels, and countless speakeasies.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Jessie Griessler, "Mother Tells Ace's Story," *Arizona Republic Sun* (Phoenix), January 9, 1944; Griessler, "Man of the Week." *Detroit Free Press Sun*. January 16, 1944; "The Story of an Ace." *Sunday Post* (Bridgeport, CT), January 9, 1944; Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 20-23; Associated Press, "Boyington's Love of Planes Dates from Childhood," *Indianapolis Star*, January 15, 1944.

⁷⁷ Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 29.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 31; "The Story of an Ace." *Sunday Post* (Bridgeport, CT), January 9, 1944.

⁷⁹ *More Than a Century of Service: A History of the Tacoma Police Department*. Edited by Erik Timothy and Joe Sexton. Tacoma Police Department: 2008; Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 35.

The move did serve to foster his love of aviation as the Tacoma airport was not too far from the family home, and he was able to visit it quite frequently.

Due to the turmoil at home, Boyington soon sought ways of escaping. Often this took the form of after-school activities, including wrestling, the Spanish Club, and the yearbook staff.⁸⁰ It was also during this time that he discovered a talent for art, after which he paid for private art lessons out of money he earned doing odd jobs. Upon graduating from high school, his family moved again, this time to Seattle, which worked in Boyington's favor as he could attend the University of Washington while living at home. While at the University of Washington, Boyington discovered the ROTC and continued to wrestle. On June 15, 1934, Boyington received a commission as a second lieutenant in the Coast Artillery Reserve.⁸¹ Boyington eventually graduated from the University of Washington with a degree in Aeronautical Engineering.

Upon graduation, Boyington went to work for Boeing as a draftsman on the XB-15 that never went into production but would provide many of the test platforms for the B-17 Flying Fortress.⁸² For Boyington, the job was a godsend. The country was still in the middle of the Great Depression, and wages were staggeringly low. However, with a wife and child on the way, he was fortunate to find such a good job. He also had his mother and younger brother to look

⁸⁰ Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 37-39.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 50.

⁸² "Historical Snapshot: XB-15 Bomber," Boeing, accessed February 18, 2019, <https://www.boeing.com/history/products/xb-15-xc-105.page>; "Historical Snapshot: B-17 Flying Fortress," Boeing, accessed February 18, 2019, <https://www.boeing.com/history/products/b-17-flying-fortress.page>; Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 51-50; *Official USMC Biography-Major Gregory Boyington*, Gregory Boyington Military Personnel File, Marine Corps Historical Department, Quantico, VA.

after, as Ellsworth Hallenbeck had walked out on his family. On April 15, 1935, Congress finally approved the Aviation Cadet Act for Navy and Marine Corps Reserves.⁸³

Boyington realized that his dream of being a military pilot could be a reality and decided to apply for a spot in the training program. However, there was one slight catch. To be eligible for the Aviation Cadet program, he would have to agree to a four-year term; the first year would be devoted to flight training after, which he would serve three additional years in order to be eligible to receive a commission. Another concern was that aviation cadets could not be married nor could they marry within the four-year term. Boyington was married, and had a child, but a loophole allowed him to get into the aviation program.

The application required additional documents, which included his college diploma, five letters of recommendation, his birth certificate, and a short resume detailing his experience. When he obtained his birth certificate, he discovered that his last name was not Hallenbeck but rather Boyington. Discovering that the man who raised him was not his father and that the name he had used all his life was not his own should have thrown him off guard. However, he used it to his advantage. In his opinion, the Marines did not need to know that Gregory Hallenbeck had a wife and child since he would be applying for the program under his birth name-- Gregory Boyington. Boyington, according to the paperwork, was not married nor did he have children.⁸⁴

⁸³ Aviation Cadet Act of 1935, H.R. 5577, 74th Cong., 1st sess., Congressional Record, Vol. XLIX, (April 15, 1935): 156-157; *Aviation Cadets Application for Flight Training in the Marine Corps Reserve*, Gregory Boyington Military Personnel File. National Archives, Washington, D.C.; *Major Gregory Boyington, Missing Marine Ace, Awarded Congressional Medal*, Gregory Boyington Military Personnel File, Marine Corps Historical Department, Quantico, VA; Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 52; Wayne H. Heiser, *U.S. Naval and Marine Corps Reserve Aviation, Volume I, 1916-1942 Chronology* (McHenry, IL: Dihedral, 2006), 89.

⁸⁴ It is unclear how he obtained his birth certificate and discovered the truth. As Bruce Gamble indicates he could have gotten a copy from his mother, but with as many moves as they made throughout his life it is possible that he would have had to request it from Idaho. In which if the latter be true, then they would have told him that they had no birth certificate for a Gregory Hallenbeck. See for more information *Major Gregory Boyington, Missing Marine Ace, Awarded Congressional Medal*, Gregory Boyington Military Personnel File, Marine Corps Historical

In early June 1935, Boyington received tacit approval if he could pass through the ten hours of elimination flight training before full acceptance into the program. Having completed the training and passing with a 3.2 out of 4.0 for flight and 3.7 out of 4.0 for officer potential, Boyington had to wait for an open space at Naval Air Station (NAS) Pensacola.⁸⁵ On January 27, 1936, Boyington was sworn into active duty and assigned to NAS Pensacola to begin his flight training.

For the next year, Boyington was a member of Class 88-C, where training would consist of five stages broken down into Squadrons. It was here at NAS Pensacola that Boyington discovered a taste for alcohol that would almost destroy his career. On March 11, 1937, he received his wings and was designated Naval Aviator No. 5160. Upon graduation, he received orders to Aircraft One stationed at Quantico, Virginia.⁸⁶ At this time, he moved his family to Fredericksburg, Virginia where they would be nearby but still far enough away to keep his secret from the brass on the base. Once on base, he learned he was attached to Marine Fighting Squadron (VF)-9M, an elite show unit similar to that of the Thunderbirds or Blue Angels of today.⁸⁷ VF-9M had a legacy of colorful pilots, and Boyington was just one of them. His drinking did not make him stand out, for the unit would often have four-day long parties when they were at air shows. Before long, the party came to an end, and Boyington found himself in

Department, Quantico, VA; George Weller, "Recalls 'Greg' As A Flier Who Knew The Ropes," *Chicago Daily News* (Chicago), January 7, 1944; "The Story of an Ace." *Sunday Post* (Bridgeport, CT), January 9, 1944; Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 54.

⁸⁵ Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 61.

⁸⁶ Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 94; Andrew A. Buffalo, *Hard Corps: Legends of the Corps* (Riverview, FL: S & B Publishing, 2004), 155; "The Story of an Ace." *Sunday Post* (Bridgeport, CT), January 9, 1944.

⁸⁷ Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 99; Jess C. Barrow, *World War II Marine Fighting Squadron Nine*, (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Tab Books, 1981).

Philadelphia for Basic School, where he spent nearly a year learning a wide range of traditional Marine warfare tactics.

After completing Basic School, Boyington received his next duty assignment, 2d Marine Aircraft Group in San Diego. His private life in San Diego was troublesome. Between his and his wife's heavy drinking and excess spending, the debt he incurred could have put him out of the Marines had they known the severity. However, he had earned a reputation for being a gifted dog-fighter. In 1940, a newly promoted 1st Lieutenant Boyington received orders to return to NAS Pensacola as a flight instructor.

Life in Pensacola saw much of the same routine as in San Diego. The couple hosted friends for parties and ran up huge debts. However, it all caught up with Boyington, and his wife Helene took the kids and moved back to Seattle.⁸⁸ With his marriage in tatters, the creditors he had run from each time they moved, caught up with him, and his superiors finally learned the truth. He tried to placate his superiors with brisk responses, saying that he was working on paying his debt and that his wife had incurred the debts while he was out at sea. It did not work, for the number of debts pouring into the base alerted them that he had a serious problem on his hands. Historian Bruce Gamble writes that Boyington had some twenty-eight debts across five states worth more than thirteen hundred dollars.⁸⁹ Boyington knew his career could be over. However, luck once again smiled down on him.

In the summer of 1941, Boyington learned about an opportunity to resign his commission with the promise that should the Marines need him to return, he could return at his current rank.

⁸⁸ Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 120-127.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 128; Kleiner, *The Flying Tigers*, 82.

After a chance encounter with Richard Aldworth, a CAMCO employee who pitched the idea to him of a higher paycheck along with a bonus for every Japanese shot out of the air, Boyington saw an opportunity of a lifetime. He now had the chance to get away from the rigor of the Marines while making money to help pay off his debts and still provide for his family.⁹⁰ It did not take much to convince him, and he submitted his resignation.

A week later, Boyington was in San Francisco awaiting transportation to China. Ironically, his passport provided by CAMCO indicated that Boyington was a member of the clergy, which could not have been further from the truth.⁹¹ Boyington loved the freedom of the AVG, but he did not get along with Chennault. In fact, for all the enjoyment he had in the AVG, he detested the man who will be discussed further in the next chapter.⁹² Boyington left the AVG in 1944, after months of frustration, wanting to go back to the Marines.

For all their differences, Chennault and Boyington were similar in some ways. They both had strong independent wills. Both grew up in homes that allowed them the freedom to explore and dream of heights unknown. Both incurred the ire of their superiors -- Chennault for his insistence that fighters, if used properly, could have a place in the Air Corps; and Boyington for his drinking. That is where the similarities end. Chennault could be strict. He required and expected his men to show extreme discipline in the air and in their preparation. Boyington, while

⁹⁰ CAMCO was the agency in China through which the AVG members were hired. For more information see Gregory "Pappy" Boyington, *Baa Baa Black Sheep: The True Story of the "Bad Boy" Hero of the Pacific Theatre and His Famous Black Sheep Squadron*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1977), 5; Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 132-136; Bob Bergin, *The Unhappy Tiger: Gregory Boyington's Brief Career As An AVG Flying Tiger*, (Fairfax, VA: Banana Tree Publishing, 2012), 1; Kleiner, *The Flying Tigers*, 82.

⁹¹ Bergin, *The Unhappy Tiger*, 1; Boyington, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, 10; Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 136; Kleiner, *The Flying Tigers*, 84.

⁹² Boyington, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, 98; Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 225; Sgt. Harry Bolser, "Flying Tiger Back in Corps for Air Fight," *McChevron*, (San Diego), July 17, 1943.

an extremely gifted pilot, lacked the necessary discipline to stay out of trouble. By the time both men were in serving together in China, Chennault had garnered a reputation for being a brilliant tactician. Boyington learned from the best and could have achieved great things if he had applied himself while a member of the Flying Tigers.

Chapter Two: Flying Tigers in China

If a legend tells a story of someone doing something exceptionally well, then the story of Chennault's Flying Tigers is one for the ages. Hampered by the lack of spare parts for damaged planes and support from the U. S. Government, what the Flying Tigers accomplished was nothing short of a miracle. In the opening months of the war in the Pacific, often outnumbered six to one with not enough planes for their pilots, the Flying Tigers gave the American people a glimmer of hope that they could defeat the Japanese Imperial Army. Though the government failed to give the men commendation for their achievements until long after the war, the Flying Tigers achieved worldwide fame for their exploits.

In April 1937, Chennault, newly retired from the Army Air Corps was in dire need of a job to support his wife and eight children. Though offers to work for various aircraft manufacturing companies frequently arrived, Chennault's love of flying kept him from accepting them.⁹³ His co-pilots from the "Three Men on a Flying Trapeze" aerobatic unit, William "Billy" MacDonald and John H. "Luke" Williamson, had accepted positions as flight instructors for the CAF.⁹⁴ Shortly before his official retirement from the Army, a letter arrived from Roy Holbrook on behalf of Madame Chiang Kai-shek, who headed China's aviation commission, asking if he would consider a three-month offer to observe the CAF.⁹⁵ Chennault accepted the offer as an

⁹³ Chennault does not detail what aircraft companies contacted him prior to his retirement. Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 30.

⁹⁴ Chennault says that he urged MacDonald and Williamson to accept the positions in China, due to them being enlisted personnel and with the emphasis on bomber-first strategies they were not considered for promotion and eligible to fly despite their outstanding achievements as members of the acrobatic unit. See for more information Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 28-29; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 42; Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 12-13; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 47.

⁹⁵ Braxton Eisel, *The Flying Tigers: Chennault's American Volunteer Group in China*, (U. S. Air Force, History Museums Program, August 27, 2013), 133, Kindle.

opportunity to earn a significant income for his family while potentially testing his pursuit theory. On May 1, 1937, he sailed for China.⁹⁶

The *President Garfield* docked in Kobe, Japan, on May 27, 1937. There, Chennault met Billy MacDonald, who traveled under the guise of management for an acrobatic touring group. Together they spent the next month observing and taking photos of potential future targets including shipping routes, manufacturing buildings, and military industries, while filling notebooks full of potentially useful information.⁹⁷ Chennault mentioned in his memoir that about “four years later...our notebooks and pictures contained more information on Japanese targets than the War Department intelligence files.”⁹⁸ Chennault and MacDonald later boarded a ship in Osaka, where they traveled the Inland Sea on their way to Shanghai.⁹⁹

In early June 1937, Chennault and MacDonald finally arrived in Shanghai where he met the two most influential people that aided him in China, William H. Donald and Madame Chiang Kai-shek. Chennault credited William Donald, a newspaper writer and sometime adviser to various local warlords, with teaching him how to play the political game in China. Meeting Madame Chiang was quite the experience for Chennault. He recalled her as a youthful ball of

⁹⁶ Roy Holbrook, a former Army Corps pilot, was acting as a confidential adviser to the Central Trust Company of China. He helped facilitate Chennault’s contract with the CAF. Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 31; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 43; Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 6; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 48.

⁹⁷ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 32; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 44; Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 14; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 49-50.

⁹⁸ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 33.

⁹⁹ There is some confusion as to whether it was the *President Garfield* they boarded for Shanghai or some other ship. Jack Samson indicates that it was the *President Garfield*, Chennault says he left his luggage aboard to complete the trip, but only later says that they boarded a ship to continue to trip. Schultz does not mention the name of the ship that will take Chennault to Shanghai. See for more information Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 32; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 44-45; Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 15; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 50.

energy with a thick southern drawl who appeared much younger than he expected.¹⁰⁰ Chennault quickly realized she was all business. Coming from a politically active family, Madame Chiang took an aggressive stance on protecting China. Having only recently taken over the responsibilities of the CAF, Madame Chiang wanted answers about how well prepared the unit was to defend China against Japan's aggression.¹⁰¹ Impressed with her military acumen Chennault promised to have a full report for her within three months.

From mid-1937 until September 1940, Chennault acted as an adviser to Madame Chiang and her husband, General Chiang Kai-shek. His first objective included observing and taking note of any deficiencies of the CAF. To his horror, he quickly learned that the CAF's operations were in dire need of serious changes. The training was minimum, and planes were inadequate. The Italians, who at the time had the sole contract for providing planes, produced inferior bomber planes and biplane fighters for China that he referred to as "death traps."¹⁰² In all probability, the biplane fighters that Chennault referred to were Fiat CR.32s. Named for their designer, Celestino Rosatelli, the CR.32s were the leading Italian fighters of the early 1930s.¹⁰³ The Fiat CR. 32s might have been considered Italy's premier fighter planes, but, Chennault felt that their hasty production in China led to planes that were quickly damaged or destroyed. Their

¹⁰⁰ Madame Chiang Kai-shek had spent her formative years in Georgia until attending Wellesley College in Massachusetts. Wellesley College created a foundation in her honor on the 25th Anniversary of her graduating from the college. It was designed to foster American-China relations while broadening the education of students on Far East Asia history and culture. See for more information Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 35; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 47; Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 16-17; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 53; "Mayling Soong Committee," Wellesley College, n.d., accessed March 23, 2019, <https://www.wellesley.edu/msc>.

¹⁰¹ Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 17.

¹⁰² Chennault actually referred to the Fiat planes as a "Firetrap" however, the context he is describing "death trap" is more appropriate. In all probability it was the Fiat CR. 32 Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 38; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 50; Robert E. Van Patten, "Before the Flying Tigers." *Air Force Magazine*, June 1999, 75.

¹⁰³ Van Patten, "Before the Flying Tigers," 75.

rapid manufacturing also led to the planes breaking down quickly and often. He also discovered that regardless of the status of a plane, whether destroyed or available as a parts replacement, no plane was ever removed from the roster of planes available. Such poor records made it appear as if China had nearly five hundred planes, when in reality the number of planes in combat-ready condition equaled only around ninety-one.¹⁰⁴

On July 7, 1937, when the Japanese attacked the Marco Polo Bridge, Chennault offered his assistance. In his memoir, he outlined three reasons for this decision. First, Chennault never ran from a fight. Second, he saw it as an opportunity to test his theories that he had developed over the years during his time in the Army Air Corps. And third, he saw “that the Sino-Japanese war would be the prelude to a great Pacific war involving the United States.”¹⁰⁵ Within two days, he had a response from General Chiang directing him to Nanchang to head up the final combat training fighter groups located at the base.¹⁰⁶ Upon his arrival and inspection, Chennault found the conditions of the base, pilots, and planes disheartening. Together with General Peter (P.T.) Mow, who was in charge of the CAF at Nanchang, and Bill MacDonald, they struggled to piece together a combat-ready group.

Chennault next moved to Nanking, known now as Nanjing, where he prepared to move to Kiukiang, today's Jiujiang, with the fighter groups. Madame Chiang informed him that the Japanese were preparing to move on Shanghai and that she needed him to go warn the American officials to evacuate their nationals and protect their property. Chennault quickly made his way

¹⁰⁴ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 38; Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 22.

¹⁰⁵ Chennault does not expand on why he believed that the Sino-Japanese conflict would be the prelude to a great war, only that it was a gut instinct. Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 38-39.

¹⁰⁶ Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 57.

to Shanghai and proceeded to inform the embassy officials who thought that the idea of the Japanese attacking Shanghai was foolish. From there, he headed over to the China National Aviation Corps (C.N.A.C.) offices and told his former flight instructor, Ernie Allison, the news but Allison believed it unrealistic. Chennault recalled that only one foreign dignitary took him seriously-- Swedish minister, Baron Beck-Fries.¹⁰⁷ The Japanese attacked Shanghai the very next day.

After having returned to Nanking, Chennault attended a meeting at the Nanking Military Academy where they learned that the Japanese were bombing the Shanghai Civic Center. Madame Chiang inquired of Chennault what might be done to deter the attacks. Chennault recommended dive-bombing and high-level-bombing the Japanese warships that had been providing heavy artillery support. However, as they soon discovered, no Chinese air officers were capable of planning such a mission, and Chennault found himself tasked with the responsibility.¹⁰⁸

Chennault and MacDonald carefully planned the mission that would become known as Black Saturday. Carefully put together, the plan called for Chinese pilots flying the Curtiss Hawk dive bombers against Japanese cruisers, while Northrop light bombers were used against the heavy cruiser *Idzumo*, which housed the Japanese naval headquarters.¹⁰⁹ The concern Chennault had with this plan was that the pilots had only been trained to bomb at fixed airspeeds while maintaining a 7,500 altitude. According to Chennault, the weather was terrible for the high-level

¹⁰⁷ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 42-43; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 55.

¹⁰⁸ Daniel Ford, *Flying Tigers: Claire Chennault and His American Volunteers, 1941-1942*, (Durham, NH: Warbird Books, 2016), 201, Kindle.

¹⁰⁹ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 45; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 56-57; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 60-61; Ford, *Flying Tigers*, 201, 221.

bombing, and rather than abort the mission, the Chinese pilots attempted to bomb at 1,500 feet.¹¹⁰ Unfortunately, it resulted in the CAF missing its targets while bombing the International Settlement, resulting in some 950 deaths and many more thousands wounded¹¹¹ The Sino-Japanese War had begun.

From Shanghai, the battle moved to Nanking, where Chennault had implemented a triangular warning net that encompassed Shanghai-Hangchow-Nanking, allowing the Chinese to be prepared for the attack.¹¹² He also tasked MacDonald and Williamson with training the best of the Chinese pilots using the defensive-pursuit theories he had developed during his days in the AAC. As Chennault recalled, the Japanese, like those of his former superiors in the AAC, believed in Douhet's theory of a bomber-first strategy in which the bombers would fly unescorted by fighters. He argued that by training the CAF in his theory, he could once and for all prove that Douhet and those who supported his theories were wrong.¹¹³ His tested defensive-pursuit theory proved to be correct. Within five days, the Japanese had lost fifty-four planes along with their crewmembers.¹¹⁴ Forty of those planes were located in China, while the rest he believed had probably crashed in the Formosa Straits.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 45.

¹¹¹ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 45; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 57-58.

¹¹² Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 48; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 59-60; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 62.

¹¹³ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 48; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 61; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 62.

¹¹⁴ Brian Lai, *Shanghai and Nanjing 1937: Massacre on the Yangtze*, (Oxford, England: Osprey Publishing, 2017) 982, Kindle; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 61; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 62.

¹¹⁵ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 49.

After successfully proving his theory during the previous five days of daylight raids, Chennault next prepared the men for attacks at night, once again, putting into practice the theories he developed at Maxwell Field in Montgomery, Alabama. Again, this utilized defensive-pursuit theory at night with the addition of searchlights enabling the pilots to see incoming bombers. For this theory to succeed, a grid pattern using searchlights relied on General C. C. Wong to place Sperry searchlights into a position that would have a two-fold effect. The first effect would blind the Japanese pilots as they looked down, and the second would allow the Chinese fighters to spot the enemy planes allowing them to attack from below.¹¹⁶ With only three days to prepare the men, the Japanese made their first appearance on the horizon. The first night resulted in no enemy planes downed; the second and third nights, however, were successful with the Japanese losing eight bombers.¹¹⁷

The Japanese, stunned at the losses they incurred at the hands of the Chinese, demanded that all American airmen leave China.¹¹⁸ In actuality, the Japanese wanted all foreigner aid to the Chinese people to leave the country. According to Chennault, the State Department appeared happy to comply and ordered everyone to return to the United States. In theory, this was to include Chennault, but he refused and enraged the Consul-General Clarence Gauss.¹¹⁹ Gauss

¹¹⁶ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 49; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 61-62; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 63.

¹¹⁷ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 50; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 63.

¹¹⁸ Americans providing aid to China gave Japan cause for diplomatic protests. Though many U.S. Officials did not believe that America had a vested interest in China, the exchange at the Marco Polo Bridge made them leary of Japan's intent. However, they maintained an uneasy truce with Japan until 1940.

¹¹⁹ As Consul-General Clarence Gauss was an American diplomat living in China. It was his job to aid American citizens with passports, birth certificates of children born in China as well as assist the local government. Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 52; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 62; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 63.

threatened Americans who stayed in China with deportation.¹²⁰ Luke Williamson, however, did return home after pressure from his wife.

In the Fall of 1940, General Chiang Kai-shek approached Chennault with the idea of purchasing the latest American fighter planes and hiring American pilots. Chennault did not believe from the start that it would be an option, for as far as he knew, all available planes that were designated for the Army or Navy were heading to Europe. However, at the insistence of Chiang, Chennault traveled back to the United States to convince the American government to provide the urgently needed planes and open a way for American pilots to assist in the fight.

Once in Washington, D.C., Chennault and General Mow met with Dr. T.V. Soong, the brother of Madame Chiang Kai-shek, whose task it was to draw the attention of the American government to the plight in China. At dinner that night, he detailed to Soong and two newspapermen, Edgar Ansel Mower of the *Chicago Daily News* and Joseph Wright Alsop, Jr., of the *New York Herald Tribune*, the advancements of the Japanese Air Force (JAF) that made it vital for the CAF to acquire newer model planes.¹²¹ Mower and Alsop, while dismayed at the news, informed Chennault that the likelihood of him securing planes for China was at best minimal due to the government's Europe-first policy.

Due to his status as a retired Air Corps officer, Chennault felt it was his duty to inform the military community of any intelligence on the Japanese in terms of technological advancements in air warfare. Even though he was no longer in active service, any information he

¹²⁰ Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 35.

¹²¹ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 93-94; Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 78 Samuel Kleiner, *The Flying Tigers: The Untold Story of the American Pilots Who Waged a Secret War Against Japan*, (New York, NY: Viking, 2018), 68.

could pass onto the military might aid in the eventual war. In one instance, he put together an extensive dossier on a plane, the Japanese Nate (Nakajima Ki 27).¹²² In this dossier, Chennault included numerous photographs and detailed notes on the construction and performance of the plane. Upon capturing the downed fighter, Chennault put it through some tests after the Army brought it to the base in Chengtu.¹²³ Unfortunately, the plane was dismissed by the Americans as an improbability, and the dossier mysteriously disappeared. According to several accounts, the reports were turned over to aeronautical experts, who dismissed it as unfeasible. The experts did not believe that a plane with the specifications and performance skills Chennault had listed in his dossier existed much less that the Japanese had the capability of building one.¹²⁴ According to Chennault, it is his opinion that the Army never saw the report since the page in the manual that should have listed the information was blank at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack.¹²⁵

On November 1, 1940, Chennault reported to the China Defense Supplies offices in Washington. There his job was to compile a list of all needed supplies and equipment for the CAF. Dr. T.V. Soong would handle the financial aspect as he already had connections with U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr., and Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox. Using these connections with high-level government officials and playing off the sympathy that FDR held for China, Chennault with Soong's input put together what he thought would be an easy

¹²² "Nakajima Ki-27 Nate (Abdul) (Type 97 Fighter) Family; Education, Type Recognition, Flash Cards, Aircraft Recognition Training Cards, WWII, USA. [ephemera]," National Air and Space Museum, March 18, 2018, accessed March 28, 2019, <https://airandspace.si.edu/collection-objects/nakajima-ki-27-nate-abdul-type-97-fighter-family-education-type-recognition-flash>; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 64; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 75.

¹²³ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 93-94; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 83; Kleiner, *The Flying Tigers: The Untold Story*, 56; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 75; *Wings Over China*, "Interview with Charlie Mott," Produced by Susan Yu, MaxMediaAsia, 1999.

¹²⁴ Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 76.

¹²⁵ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 92; Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 76.

plan to get supplies and equipment to China. He argued that an adequately manned and equipped CAF could occupy the JAF to keep them from attacking Singapore, which was a severe concern for the British. Chennault's plan called for three hundred and fifty fighter planes and one hundred and fifty bombers. While not exorbitant, the government did not feel it was feasible to accommodate this request.¹²⁶

In February 1941, Chennault and a friend who worked at the Curtiss-Wright Aircraft Company (CWAC) came up with the idea that if the British could be talked into waving their rights to one hundred P-40s aircraft currently in production, then CWAC would give them priority on a newer model, the P-40C. The British agreed to this arrangement as they preferred to have the latest model available.¹²⁷ Now that Chennault had planes secured, the next pressing issue was ammunition. They finally secured ammunition through the Lend-Lease program in late August.

Though the White House had approved the purchase of planes and ammunition, getting spare parts turned into a nightmare. The Army refused to assist. The CWAC had halted production on the P-40s, thus parts were limited. Thankfully, after pressure applied by the right individuals, the parts were finally supplied. At the invitation of General Chiang Kai-shek, Lauchlin Currie, an adviser to Roosevelt, visited China to gather intelligence on the status of the CAF and the ground war against Japan. It was partially because of this visit that Roosevelt's White House agreed to include China in the Lend-Lease program. Another outcome resulted in a verbal agreement to loan reserve officers and enlisted men to China, with the provision that as

¹²⁶ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 96-99; Kleiner, *The Flying Tigers: The Untold Story*, 68; Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 77-86.

¹²⁷ Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 81.

long as they could pass the physical requirements, they would be allowed to return to their duty station upon returning home.¹²⁸

There remained one hurdle in the way. Bill Pawley produced a signed contract that stated that he was to be paid ten percent commission by Curtiss-Wright for any planes sold to China. Now he was demanding that he be paid \$4.5 million for the one hundred P-40C planes that China had just acquired. An agreed-upon settlement paid him two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, along with a guaranteed contract between him and China in which CAMCO received sole responsibility for rebuilding and testing planes, hiring and paying the personnel needed for three advanced training and instruction units.¹²⁹

By April 1941, recruiting of volunteers began after orders from Navy Secretary Knox, and General Henry “Hap” Arnold went out to the military bases that allowed civilians to interview potential personnel. Of course, this angered the base commanders once they realized that these recruiters were trying to steal their pilots.¹³⁰ They had received 243 applications, which were then whittled down to eighteen pilots and fifty-eight ground personnel. More personnel, including seven medical and fifty-five administrative positions, signed contracts between June and October. The first group sailed for China on June 9, while the second group containing one hundred twenty-three left on July 10. The last detachment of personnel would leave in September, and Gregory Boyington was among this last group.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 80-81.

¹²⁹ Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 84; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 80.

¹³⁰ *Memorandum For The Chief Of The Bureau Of Navigation: Subject Enlisted Personnel- Discharge for China*, Navy Department, Bureau of Navigation, (College Park, MD: National Archives, 1941); Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 89; Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 85-86; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 80.

¹³¹ Boyington, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, 9-10.

It is through looking at the contract with CAMCO that one begins to understand what enticed the volunteers to sign up and go to China. Had the men not signed these contracts and gone to China, the Flying Tigers would not have existed. According to the official file of Arvid Olson, Jr., maintained at the Air Force Historical Research Agency at Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, Alabama, the CAMCO contract had several provisions.¹³² The first provided for travel arrangements to China with a signed employment contract. Another provision in the contract was stipulations for termination of the contract, which included insubordination, revealing confidential information, drug use, excessive drinking, and illness or injury due to bad conduct.¹³³

The men volunteered for a variety of reasons, which included money, adventure, excitement, and experience. Gregory Boyington joined for the money. Deeply in debt and under the constant threat of losing his commission with the Marines, Boyington saw it as an opportunity to make money and repay his debts quickly.¹³⁴ Charles “Charlie” Bond joined under the lure of excitement and adventure on the other side of the world.¹³⁵ John Tyler Donovan saw it as an opportunity to serve in the war and punish the enemy.¹³⁶ Robert Smith signed up for the increase in pay, going from \$84 in the air corps to \$300 a month with the AVG.¹³⁷ Whatever the

¹³² The file for Arvid Olson, Jr.’s American Volunteer Group File, is a digital file that can be accessed by visiting the Air Force Historical Research Agency (hereafter AFHRA) at Maxwell, Air Force Base, the same location that Claire Lee Chennault once taught tactical skills to pilots.

¹³³ *CAMCO Employment Contract*, Arvid Olson, Jr.’s American Volunteer Group File, AFHRA, Maxwell, Air Force Base. Also see Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 92-93; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 81-82.

¹³⁴ Boyington, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, 5.

¹³⁵ *AVG 2014 Reunion*, Produced by Larry Jobe, The Flying Tigers Historical Organization, 2014.

¹³⁶ Susan Clotfelter Jimison, *Through the Eyes of a Tiger: The John Donovan Story*, (Athens, GA: Deeds Publishing, 2015), 56-57.

¹³⁷ Ford, *Flying Tigers*, 753.

reasons they joined, there were those who saw these men as mere mercenaries that were paid a bonus for every enemy plane shot down.¹³⁸

On July 28, the first group of volunteers arrived in Rangoon in Southeast Asia. Chennault's first task was three-fold. First, he had to prepare the base at Toungoo, then he had to find enough spare parts to keep the P-40s in the air, and lastly, he had to train the men to operate as a unit. The original plan had called for the men to train at Kunming. However, due to the slow shipment of the P-40s, some last minute red tape in Washington, and monsoon season underway the best option available to Chennault's unit was Toungoo. The benefit to this was that they would have an asphalt runway to train pilots on instead of the typical mud one.¹³⁹

The second group arrived on August 15, 1941, though Chennault would not be there to greet them as he was in Chungking at a meeting with the General and Madame Chiang. According to Arvid Olson Jr.'s, *Diary of 3rd Pursuit Squadron*, the men got into a routine of daily training, church, and complaints about the food. Olson was the squadron leader, and as such, he kept a daily diary, recording the everyday life of the unit. Reading the diary, it appears that from August 23 to December 11, 1941, the men at Toungoo did nothing more than training exercises to keep them ready for combat, along with training CAF pilots in Chennault's defensive-pursuit theory and tactics.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Eisel, *The Flying Tigers*, 13; Ford, *Flying Tigers*, 791; Daniel Ford, *Remains: A Story of the Flying Tigers, Gallant Mercenaries Who Won Immortality Defending Burma and China Against Japanese Invasion*, (Durham, NH: Warbird Books, 2014), 72-73.

¹³⁹ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 105-107; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 95; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 99-100.

¹⁴⁰ *Diary of 3rd Pursuit Squadron*, Arvid Olson Jr's American Volunteer File, AFRHA: Maxwell, Air Force Base.

Chennault arrived in Toungoo on August 21, where he found the morale of the men at a low point. Five of the men immediately handed in their resignation, citing that the situation and conditions had been misrepresented. The men had expected to train in China but were in Toungoo, Burma, instead. After he accepted those resignations, he called a meeting for the remaining men. Reminding them of the provisions in their contracts for failure to carry out their duties, he went about setting down what would be their schedule for the next several months. This schedule included sixty hours of flight training and ground classes, which consisted of two seventy-two hour classes. Not only did they have the training to undergo, but Chennault insisted upon a daily routine of calisthenics, fines for misbehaviors, and set times for meals. Anyone late to class received fines to pay.¹⁴¹

With a daily routine firmly in place, Chennault noticed that his men finally started getting into flying shape. Many of the men had purchased bicycles as vehicles were in short supply, while others hiked to the teak plantations to elephant watch.¹⁴² Nights were spent either reading or hanging out at the bar drinking and playing cards. In the first few months of training, twenty-three men resigned. Some quit, some were fired for insubordination, and some were fired for excessive drinking. September was also a somber month as two men lost their lives. John Armstrong died while dogfighting his wingman, and Maax C. Hammer died in a non-combat related plane crash¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 112; Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 94-95, Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 106-108; *Wings Over China*, "Interview with David Lee "Tex" Hill," Produced by Susan Yu, MaxMediaAsia, 1999.

¹⁴² Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 111; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 108.

¹⁴³ *Diary of 3rd Pursuit Squadron*, Arvid Olson Jr., American Volunteer File, (AFHRA: Maxwell Air Force Base), September 24, 1941 entry; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 115.

In November 1941, the last contingent of men arrived. Gregory Boyington was among this last group. Arriving in Rangoon, the men soon learned that this was not to be their base of operations. Instead, they would be moving closer to central Burma in Toungoo. They finally arrived in Toungoo in the middle of November and settled into a routine. Chennault separated the men into three units: First Pursuit (Adam and Eve), Second Pursuit (Panda Bears), and Third Pursuit (Hell's Angels). Each unit would live, train, and work together. Like many military units throughout history, they would become closer than brothers.

The routine was fairly straight forward and simple. The men awakened at 5:00 a.m. daily, they had a light breakfast, they had classroom time at six a.m. going over maps, and then while it was still cool enough they would take to the air practicing dogfights for an hour and a half.¹⁴⁴ As the muggy afternoon rolled in, Chennault and the men would take to the classroom, where his experience as a teacher served him well. It was in the classroom with these men that he was finally able to put to use years of notes taken on Japanese tactics and their planes.¹⁴⁵

Chennault knew first hand that the Japanese had built first-rate planes, and in some cases, they were far superior to the ones American troops were flying. During each class, he went over the strengths, weaknesses, and vulnerable spots for each enemy plane. He would mark the weak spots, then test the men by having them locate the target spots for themselves.¹⁴⁶ Chennault described the formations used by the enemy, how they would lull a plane into thinking they were alone, then just as quickly tighten up the formation allowing their gunners a concentrated firing

¹⁴⁴ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 112, 114; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 107; Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 101; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 113.

¹⁴⁵ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 112; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 107; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 111.

¹⁴⁶ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 113; Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 101; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 114.

range. However, Chennault did not just focus on enemy planes. He finally had the freedom to teach his men his theories.

Chennault stressed teamwork above all else. According to his theories, it was better for fighters to approach a target as a team. Using two or three planes, one would come in above the enemy, another below the enemy and one would hang back so that he could get the final shot that would down the enemy. The idea was that by having two fighters concentrate all their attention as a team on one bomber, they would have twelve guns instead of six firing at the target. One could dive in while the other watched his tail to ensure that an enemy fighter did not attack.¹⁴⁷ According to Chennault, “The object of our tactics is to break up their formations and make them fight according to our style. Once the Japanese are forced to deviate from their plan, they are in trouble. Their rigid air discipline can be used as a powerful weapon against them.”¹⁴⁸ Chennault knew he had to convince the men that this unconventional training would help them succeed in the dense jungles of Burma and China.

As training continued during the early period of the AVG’s time in Toungoo, spare parts became the most critical problem. Curtiss-Wright was not producing spare parts for planes already in the field, as they had been ordered to produce only complete planes. This led to a severe problem for the AVG. Frantic for parts, including tail-wheel tires, electric switches, radio tubes, gun solenoids, carburetors, spark plugs, batteries, and other vital parts to keep planes in the skies, the mechanics of the AVG turned to utilize the parts off of crashed planes.¹⁴⁹ One

¹⁴⁷ Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 103; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 115-116.

¹⁴⁸ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 112.

¹⁴⁹ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 117; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 122; *Wings Over China*, “Interview with Erik Shilling,” Produced by Susan Yu, MaxMediaAsia, 1999.

possible avenue for spare parts came through Manila and General Douglass MacArthur, who was able to supply the AVG with spare tires. While the staff of China Defense Supplies in Washington did their best to wrangle up as many spare parts as possible, they would not arrive until March 1942.¹⁵⁰

Starting in early October, Chennault had his men doing reconnaissance missions using an aerial camera loaned to them by the RAF. Most of these reconnaissance missions centered on the border area with Thailand for the base at Toungoo was just sixty miles away. Due to the long history of imperialism in Thailand by the British and the French, the Thai government welcomed any aid Japan was willing to give them. The Japanese occupied the fields in Thailand and used them as a launch pad into Burma. Utilizing the aerial camera enabled both the AVG and the RAF to know the location and how many planes the Japanese had at their disposal.

On December 8, 1941, news reached the AVG about the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Arvid Olson, Jr., made just a brief note about it in the squadron diary: “Japan declares war on the United States and Great Britain. 24-hour alert ordered by Field Order No. 2 issued by 1st AVG Headquarters.” The remainder of the entry for the day broke down the responsibilities for each group along with the notification to be prepared for a move.¹⁵¹ Chennault’s dedication and determination to promote and use a defensive pursuit-first strategy led him to train his men to the best of his ability. The bombing of Pearl Harbor opened the door of opportunity for Chennault to prove that his theories worked.¹⁵² Through careful consideration of the events from December

¹⁵⁰ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 118; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 125.

¹⁵¹ *Diary of 3rd Pursuit Squadron*, Arvid Olson Jr., American Volunteer File, (AFHRA: Maxwell Air Force Base), December 8, 1941 entry; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 115.

¹⁵² *Wings Over China*, “Interview with Ed Rector,” Produced by Susan Yu, MaxMediaAsia, 1999.

1941 through July 4, 1942, it is possible to comprehend that through Chennault's tactics, strategies, and leadership, the Flying Tigers accomplished what otherwise might have been impossible.

On December 10, Chennault recalled that Thailand had surrendered to the Japanese, and after sending an aerial reconnaissance plane flown by Erik Shilling, he learned that the Japanese had more than enough planes and troops to attack the Burma border.¹⁵³ The Hell's Angels under the command of Arvid Olson relocated to Mingaladon on December 12, 1941, to join in defense of Rangoon.¹⁵⁴ Chennault had realized that both ends of the Burma Road needed protection if supplies were going to be able to get through to China. The Burma Road was essential to getting supplies into China. Without it, China would be cut off from the world, making it easier for the Japanese to conquer the entire country. Therefore, one squadron found itself stationed in Rangoon, while the remaining two relocated to Kunming. Chennault knew that some of his men were not ready for combat, and there were still planes in dire need of repairs, but time was of the essence. However, Chennault would not allow a pilot to fly a combat mission unless he felt that they were ready by his standards. The Japanese bombed Kunming on December 18, 1941. Trucks carried base personnel and supplies up the Burma Road, while the C.N.A.C. took Chennault, his combat staff, and necessary materials, such as oxygen and ammunition, to Kunming the next day.

¹⁵³ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 126; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 116; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 131.

¹⁵⁴ The order to ship out to Mingaladon had arrived on December 11, 1941, Mingaladon is located in Rangoon, Burma. *Diary of 3rd Pursuit Squadron*, Arvid Olson Jr., American Volunteer File, (AFHRA: Maxwell Air Force Base), December 11, 1941 entry. Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 126; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 117; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 133.

The First and Second Pursuit Squadrons had left Toungoo for Kunming on December 18. Chennault recalled, “by dawn on the nineteenth we had thirty-four P-40s ready to fight at Kunming with a fighter-control headquarters hooked into the Yunnan warning net and the Chinese code rooms that were monitoring Japanese operational radio frequencies and decoding enemy messages. For the first time since mid-October I breathed easier.”¹⁵⁵ Chennault blamed the fall of Rangoon on the RAF commander that did not allow him to install an early warning system. However, the commander felt that he could rely on his radar and long-distance phone for adequate notification.

Arvid Olson recorded in the Third Pursuit Squadron’s diary that on December 19, the First Pursuit Squadron had downed three Japanese bombers with at least two or three more hit. However, Chennault recalled that it was quiet on the 19th, and what Olson recorded as the 19th had occurred on the 20th.¹⁵⁶ It is highly likely since the diary is an official record that Chennault mixed up the dates and that the event took place on December 19. The Adam and Eves under Robert Sandell engaged the enemy around Iliang, about thirty miles southeast of Kunming. It was a frenzied free-for-all in the air, yet they managed to take down three bombers and damaged many others.¹⁵⁷ The only loss for the AVG that day was Ed Rector’s plane. Fortunately, Rector escaped with only minor injuries. After going over the events of the morning at a debriefing, Chennault told the men, “It was a good job but not good enough. Next time get them all.”¹⁵⁸ For

¹⁵⁵ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 127; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 117; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 134.

¹⁵⁶ *Diary of 3rd Pursuit Squadron*, Arvid Olson, Jr., American Volunteer Files, (AFHRA: Maxwell Air Force Base), December 19, 1941 entry; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 127-128.

¹⁵⁷ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 129-130; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 118-119; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 141-143.

¹⁵⁸ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 130; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 119.

Chennault, nothing less than a complete victory against the enemy was acceptable. Accordingly, Chennault recalled that in late 1945, he discovered his men had nearly taken down all the bombers of this first mission. One of the men from that day would later be shot down and taken as a Prisoner of War (POW), and he learned during his captivity that only one of the bombers had returned to its base. The Japanese never attempted to bomb Kunming as long as the AVG remained there.¹⁵⁹

The diary of the Third Pursuit Squadron indicated that December 25, 1941, was a day to remember. In the days leading up to the Christmas morning attack, the Japanese began aerial assaults on Rangoon.¹⁶⁰ The lack of an early warning system made it possible for the Japanese to bomb the base without any interference. Once again, this lack of the warning system that Chennault argued for proved him correct. Chennault attempted to pull his one squadron from Rangoon, but the Generalissimo overruled him. So his men were left to attempt to protect Rangoon as best as they could with little to no help. On Christmas Day, the Japanese returned with a plan to finish their destruction of Rangoon. This time they came prepared with ninety-two planes to the AVG's twelve that were lying in wait for them. When the raid was over, Olson informed Chennault that they had taken down fifteen bombers and nine fighters, only losing two of their planes. The RAF managed to shoot down seven planes, but they took a more substantial loss with nine Brewster F2A Buffaloes and six pilots.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Lewis Bishop would be shot down five months after the battle over Iliang, and would learn from the Japanese pilot who had led the raid that his was the only crew to return that day. See Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 130; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 119.

¹⁶⁰ "The Colonel's Flying Tigers," *Coos Bay Times*, (Marshfield and North Bend, Oregon), December 30, 1941, 2; "Volunteer U.S. Airman Reports Japs On Run," *The Gettysburg Times* (Gettysburg, PA), December 29, 1941, 6.

¹⁶¹ The Brewster F2A Buffaloes were designed and produced by American manufacturer Brewster Aeronautical Corporation. See *Diary of 3rd Pursuit Squadron*, Arvid Olson Jr., American Volunteer File, (AFHRA:

After the Christmas Day melee, the Panda Bears of the Second Pursuit Squadron moved to Rangoon to aid Olson's unit, which was down to only eleven planes in service. During this time, the AVG units worked overtime to keep the port of Rangoon open. Chennault knew that it was just a matter of time before the Japanese had control of Rangoon, and so his men were working overtime to get supplies loaded onto convoys heading to Kunming.¹⁶² Supplies had started coming in and had piled up as the locals evacuated the area, so it fell to the men of the AVG to attempt to get as many supplies out of Rangoon as possible.

Between January 17 and 28, the Japanese hit Rangoon with six significant attacks.¹⁶³ While the Japanese had hoped to catch the AVG off guard, they were unable to do so. While details of these six engagements are scarce, the Japanese took a loss of fifty planes in comparison to the relatively low numbers of both the RAF and the AVG, which lost a combined number of only twelve.¹⁶⁴ According to Chennault, Jack Newkirk, leader of Second Pursuit Squadron, radioed him at Kunming informing him that "the more hardships, work and fighting the men

Maxwell Air Force Base), December 25, 1941 entry; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 134; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 121; Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 128-129; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 152-157.

¹⁶² Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 132-140; Daniel Ford, "Flying tigers bite back! Two weeks after Pearl Harbor, shark-faced Flying Tiger fighters break Japan's winning streak, devouring a raid over China in their first combat," *America in WWII*, December 2010, 32, accessed May 4, 2019, http://link.galegroup.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/A401214413/AONE?u=vic_liberty&sid=AONE&xid=ec82843a.

¹⁶³ "Chinese Dub Daring AVG Pilots 'Flying Tigers'," *The Fresno Bee* (Fresno, CA), January 26, 1942; "U.S. Airmen 'Flying Tigers' To Chinese," *Star-Gazette* (Elmira, NY), January 26, 1942; "U.S. Flying Tigers: Burma Pilots Score Again Over Japs," *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), January 28, 1942; "'Flying Tigers' Bag Dozen Jap Planes in Burma," *The Tampa Times* (Tampa, FL), January 28, 1942.

¹⁶⁴ The diary of the Third Pursuit Squadron is maintained at the AFHRA, and sadly it is illegible for January 19th through to the 21st of February. Some pages are completely black. The paper used to maintain the diary back in the 1940s was thin, and the diary was typed so over time the ink faded and when the archives scanned the diary to make digital copies for preservation many pages were lost to time. See *Diary of 3rd Pursuit Squadron*, Arvid Olson Jr's., American Volunteer Group File, (AFHRA: Maxwell Air Force Base), January 17-18, 1941 entries; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 135; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 124; Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 142.

have to do the higher our morale goes. Squadron spirit really strong now.”¹⁶⁵ The morale of the men had a direct impact on how well they accomplished the task ahead of them. When morale slipped, men were likely not to perform as well in the air. However, when morale soared, the unit achieved high ratios of kills. Chennault did what he could to keep the morale of the men up with games of baseball and trips into town during downtime.¹⁶⁶ The AVG did lose two of its members during this time. The Japanese shot Bert Christman down over Rangoon on January 23, and Louis Hoffman was downed on January 26, 1942.¹⁶⁷ Chennault now had to send First Pursuit Squadron down to Rangoon to help support the units currently stationed on the base.

Gregory Boyington recalled that his chance to get in the action with the Flying Tigers had finally arrived. As the First Pursuit Squadron headed to Rangoon, he felt exhilarated.¹⁶⁸ Just as the sun set, the squadron arrived at Mingaladon Field on February 2, 1942. By the time they had landed and refueled, it was too dark to explore the area, so they settled for gathering information from the pilots who had already experienced the Japanese attacks to better prepare for the attack. That attack came three days later, and Boyington claims to have become disillusioned with the tactics and close formation he had been trained to use. Though he claimed to have become disillusioned with the tactics, it is ironic that he incorporated many of them when he returned to the Marines and formed the Black Sheep Squadron. He also recalled not writing up his first combat report due to how poorly he had done. Boyington did not manage to shoot down a plane

¹⁶⁵ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 137; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 181.

¹⁶⁶ "World Battlefronts," *Time*, December 6, 1943, 12-14.

¹⁶⁷ Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 146, Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 178-179.

¹⁶⁸ Boyington, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, 42; Bob Bergin, *The Unhappy Tiger: Gregory Boyington's Brief Career As An AVG Flying Tiger*, (Fairfax, VA: Banana Tree Press, 2012), 48, Kindle; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 167.

and instead returned to the airbase with a wound.¹⁶⁹ On his second flight, Boyington led the formation, and in doing so, he ensured that the formation knew precisely where it was going and was able to take out sixteen enemy planes while losing none of theirs. Boyington notched his first kill.¹⁷⁰

By this time, Chennault had started to receive large numbers of newspaper clippings from papers back home in the United States detailing the success of the AVG, which the papers had labeled The Flying Tigers.¹⁷¹ The men now found themselves famous for their daring victories over the Japanese at a time when America was losing on every other front in the Pacific. Chennault credited the teamwork of the pilots and ground crew for their success at Rangoon. He claimed that had the ground crew not been so successful at quick repairs, refueling and relaunching then the Japanese could have quickly taken the AVG out of the fight. However, because they worked together like a beautifully tuned machine, they were able to pull together staying one step ahead. The ground crew had quickly learned their responsibility for keeping the Flying Tigers in the air from Chennault, who impressed upon the men a sense of urgency and of doing what they could with what they had on hand.

By mid-February, the Japanese had sent reinforcements to Thailand to continue the assault on Rangoon. By the end of the month, they were sending on average two hundred planes to hammer the city. First Pursuit Squadron had lost Robert Sandell, who had died testing a

¹⁶⁹ Boyington, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, 48.

¹⁷⁰ Boyington, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, 50-51, Bergin, *The Unhappy Tiger*, 48.

¹⁷¹ "Fearless American 'Flying Tigers' Stymie Jap Drive Against Vital Burma Road" *Bradford Evening Star and Daily Record* (Bradford, PA), February 11, 1942; "American Flying Tigers Give Jap Pilots Worst Licking In Burma Fight," *The St. Louis Star-Times* (St. Louis, MO), February 14, 1942; "Flying Tigers' Make Aviation History On Burma Road: 185 Jap Planes Downed In Two Months By U.S. Men," *Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, MS) February 16, 1942.

repaired P-40 over Mingaladon on February 7, and with his death, Bob Neale stepped into his place.¹⁷² Neale took his job at Rangoon seriously. All strafing and bomber escort missions halted by strict commands of Chennault. Neale was to prepare for one last stand and then evacuate Mingaladon.

The final assault came on February 26, 1942, when the Japanese sent around one hundred and sixty-six planes to face the nine planes of the AVG along with the six planes of the RAF. The results were nothing short of a miracle. Everything that Chennault taught the men through his defensive-pursuit strategy aided the men as they managed to hold the enemy at bay. The AVG faced three raids that day and managed not to lose a single plane or pilot and yet still managed to shoot down twenty-four Japanese planes. The next day, they faced two hundred enemy planes, losing two of their planes but still managing to bag another eighteen for a two day total of forty-three planes.¹⁷³ The Japanese outnumbered the AVG in a ten to one ratio; therefore, the number of downed enemy planes for the two days demonstrated just how well their commander had trained them.

On February 28, Neale sent four of his remaining six P-40s, of which Boyington was one, to provide cover for the last AVG convoy heading to Magwe.¹⁷⁴ From Magwe they continued to Kunming. Only Neale and his wingman stayed behind as they had a missing man and had hoped to locate him. The next day, after searching and not locating the pilot, they evacuated to the

¹⁷² Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 137; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 125; Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 146; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 185.

¹⁷³ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 138; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 126; *Wings Over China*, "Interview with David Lee "Tex" Hill," Produced by Susan Yu, MaxMediaAsia, 1999.

¹⁷⁴ "New Hannover Flying Tiger Returns Home For Visit," *Wilmington Morning Star*, Wilmington NC, September 15, 1942; Bergin, *The Unhappy Tiger*, 64; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 126; Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 148; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 195.

north. On March 4, 1942, the Japanese held Rangoon, and the battle for the southern portion of Burma was over.

The northern portion of Burma still had to be protected and kept open for the Chinese and AVG to maintain a flow of supplies that were desperately needed. It was around this time that General Joseph “Vinegar Joe” Stilwell arrived in China. Stilwell was old school army; he had no trust in airpower nor any weapon for that matter that was not a rifle. To protect the northern portion of Burma, Stilwell took Chinese armies and placed them on the left flank in the Sittang Valley around Toungoo, while the British focused on the right in the Irrawaddy Valley.¹⁷⁵ Neither expected the Japanese to venture into the north believing that they had all of Burma they wanted in Rangoon. However, as the AVG and the RAF soon discovered, the Japanese would start shifting their attention in a more northerly direction.

This shift in strategy consisted of the Japanese attempting to catch the units unprepared and on the ground. However, the AVG and RAF had squadrons positioned at Magwe, Burma, which consisted of a poorly and hastily built airstrip located about two hundred and fifty miles from Rangoon. They also used the former training field at Toungoo as a refueling station, which allowed reconnaissance missions into Thailand and along southern portions of Burma. Arvid Olson Jr. recalled in the Third Pursuit Diary that on March 5, 1942, four of their pilots headed to Magwe, while another five escorted the Generalissimo and Madame Chiang as they left Kunming headed to Chungking.¹⁷⁶ Gregory Boyington was among the five escorting the

¹⁷⁵ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 144; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 128.

¹⁷⁶ *Diary of 3rd Pursuit Squadron*, Arvid Olson Jr., entry dated March 5, 1942; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 199.

Chiangs' plane; they were only supposed to escort the CNAC plane so far and then return to Kunming.

Unfortunately for the men, Boyington did not pay attention to orders, and they ran out of gas on the return trip home. Bob Layher was the first to run out of gas, while Boyington and three others were able to go another seventy-five miles before having to land on top of a hill. The four planes were damaged, two of those four were lost entirely.¹⁷⁷ Finally making it back to the base, Boyington took responsibility for the failure and offered to return to the hill with a mechanic. Out of the four crashed planes, Boyington managed to return two of them to the base. The remaining two had their parts removed for spare parts for other planes.¹⁷⁸ Boyington's willingness to accept responsibility for the crashed planes speaks to one aspect of what it took to be a good leader.

Entrenched at Magwe, the men of the Hell's Angels found themselves contending with a power struggle on the ground regarding what their mission at the base entailed. According to historian Daniel Ford, Chennault wanted the men to conserve as much as they could for future use, while the British wanted them covering their retreat. He further contended that General Chiang wanted them providing ground support for the Chinese Army, while Stilwell felt the unit should provide reconnaissance. Stilwell won.¹⁷⁹ On March 10, 1942, Chennault issued the

¹⁷⁷ William H. Fish, Jr. and Martin Sheridan, "Flying Tiger: Over The Road To Mandalay," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, PA), June 14, 1942; Bergin, *The Unhappy Tiger*, 105; Boyington, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, 66-74. *Diary of 3rd Pursuit Squadron*, Arvid Olson Jr., entry dated March 5, 1942; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 200-201.

¹⁷⁸ Ford, *Flying Tigers*, 3388.

¹⁷⁹ Ford, *Flying Tigers*, 3461.

following Reconnaissance Orders to the Third Pursuit Squadron at the behest of General Stilwell.¹⁸⁰

- 1.) Strength and Equipment (Tanks, Artillery, etc.) of the enemy which infiltrated between Nyaunglebin and Toungoo area, and the point where their forward post now are reaching. And look out if there any reinforcement behind them.
- 2.) Strength, equipment, and movement of the enemy at South and S.E. of Nyaunglebin.
- 3.) Any enemy units are landing near Moulmein area? What's the number of their transport ships?
- 4.) Has the railway transportation between Moulmein and Sittang recovered already?
- 5.) Any trace of the enemy at north of Nyaunglebin and east of Sittang River? And their position, as well as movement (halt or on marching?)
- 6.) The situation of the enemy's activities near Rangoon outskirts after their occupation of this town. Are they still continuing their advancing further north? What about the direction they're now advancing to, and the point they're now reaching; as well as their strength?

As is evidenced, the Third Pursuit Squadron tasked with the effort of ensuring that the AVG knew where the Japanese were on their attempts to overtake all of Burma, followed Chennault's order to the letter. By providing the information as requested, it enabled the AVG to take the battle to the Japanese and prevent them from moving closer to China.

On March 16, Olson noted in the unit's diary that the Japanese appeared to be moving up the Burma Road towards Toungoo. He noted that the British were trying to slow down the move up the road and that the AVG was targeting barges that were unloading men.¹⁸¹ On March 18 and 19, the AVG strafed Moulmein, repeatedly attacking with bombs and machine guns.¹⁸² The

¹⁸⁰ *The Instructions of Air Reconnaissance*, Claire Lee Chennault, American Volunteer File, (AFHRA: Maxwell Air Force Base).

¹⁸¹ *Diary of 3rd Pursuit Squadron*, Arvid Olson Jr., entry dated March 17, 1942.

¹⁸² "Flying Tigers Worry Japs," *The Leaf-Chronicle* (Clarksville, TN), March 18, 1942.

first day, they managed to destroy fifteen enemy planes with five probable destroyed and ten damaged. The second day saw another nineteen enemy planes destroyed.¹⁸³ Chennault recalled that this was the “highest individual bags ever scored by A.V.G. pilots.”¹⁸⁴ The AVG had managed to surprise the Japanese.

March 21 and 22 were low points for the AVG at Magwe. The Japanese had been pushing up the Burma Road, and they were aiming for Magwe in hopes of putting the AVG out of commission. The Japanese made three runs on Magwe on March 21, mortally wounding two men. However, four of the AVG pilots were able to shoot down four enemies planes, with one probable kill by a ground crew with a Thompson submachine gun, also known as the Tommy gun, as the Japanese Zeros flew low to the ground.¹⁸⁵ By the time they were finished on March 22, only three P-40s were flyable, and the men of the AVG evacuated out of Magwe and headed towards Loiwing.¹⁸⁶

On March 23, the First and Second Squadrons led by Bob Neale, Gregory Boyington, and Jack Newkirk left Kunming, refueled at Loiwing and proceeded to Heho and Namsang RAF bases near the Thai border. The next morning, they headed towards their targets. Neale and Boyington led their contingent to Chiengmai, where they were able to catch the Japanese in a

¹⁸³ *Diary of 3rd Pursuit Squadron*, Arvid Olson Jr., entries marked March 18, 1942 and March 19, 1942; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 145.

¹⁸⁴ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 145.

¹⁸⁵ *Diary of 3rd Pursuit Squadron*, Arvid Olson Jr., entry marked March 21, 1942; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 146; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 130.

¹⁸⁶ *Diary of 3rd Pursuit Squadron*, Arvid Olson Jr., entry marked March 22, 1942; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 146; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 221.

surprise attack that destroyed thirty planes on the ground.¹⁸⁷ Newkirk's intended target of Lampang was empty. However, they destroyed the Lampang-Chiangmai road as his group headed to meet up with Neale's group. During this mission, they lost Jack Newkirk when his plane crashed and burned, while William "Black Mac" McGarry had to bail out over Thailand and spent the remainder of the war in jail in Bangkok.¹⁸⁸

In a letter dated March 24, 1942, Chennault ordered Olson to take his Third Pursuit Squadron to Loiwing to aid the Chinese ground troops, to prevent the Japanese from attacking Loiwing, and to accept any missions that did not act in contradiction to Chennault's orders given by General Stilwell or General Lin. If an order contradicted Chennault's standing orders, they were to contact him first by radio to let him know so that he would be aware of any special missions.¹⁸⁹

By April, the word had spread around that the AVG soon faced induction into the Army Air Corps. Chennault had done his best to put this off until the men's contract with CAMCO expired in July. Boyington, who had a regular commission waiting for him back in the Marines, asked what was to be done in cases such as his, to which Chennault replied, "I have my orders. Everybody is to be commissioned in the Air Corps not later than July 1, 1942."¹⁹⁰ Boyington

¹⁸⁷ "Yanks Strike 70 Miles Into Thailand Area: "Flying Tigers" Of AVG Surprise Japs In Raid of Chiangmai," *Globe-Gazette* (Mason City, IA) March 27, 1942.

¹⁸⁸ "U.S. Squadron Chief In Burma, Husband of Local Girl, Killed: Raid Bagging 40 Jap Planes Married by Death of Leader," *Lansing State Journal* (Lansing, MI), March 25, 1942; "American Ace Dies In Action: Jack Newkirk Killed During Raid by Flying Tigers on Jap Base," *The Dispatch* (Moline, IL) March 25, 1942; Boyington, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, 80-85; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 148; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 130-131; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 223-224.

¹⁸⁹ *Letter to Arvid Olson from Claire Lee Chennault, March 24, 1942*, American Volunteer File, (AFHRA: Maxwell Air Force Base).

¹⁹⁰ Boyington, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, 86.

could only think of getting out of Kunming. However, the battle over Burma was not finished. April 8 saw the Japanese attack the Loiwing base. Their attack failed thanks to a sound warning system in place. Only two Hurricanes of the RAF were lost, while the Japanese lost ten of their planes.¹⁹¹

At Loiwing, the AVG had another issue to contend with, that of General Stilwell who felt that air power was meant for reconnaissance. He expected the men of the unit to fly low-level visual reconnaissance for his troops on the ground. What he did not understand was that by asking the men of the AVG to do so was putting their lives in danger, and to Chennault, if Stilwell was ready to lose his life that was one thing, his men had no intention of losing theirs. The combination of flying these low-level missions along with the additional missions of jungle strafing was enough to lower the morale level among the men. The low morale caused the men to revolt against Chennault's orders, as many as twenty-three submitted resignations that went unanswered and a petition sent around demanding that the morale missions as they were called be put to an immediate end. The men of the AVG were adamant; they had come to China to fight, not to be sitting targets. Chennault may not have approved of the missions, but he understood his place in the chain of command, and as an exceptional leader, he followed commands issued to him. Chennault understood the frustrations of his men. However, Stilwell outranked him, so he had no choice but to order the men into missions he knew angered them.

As Emperor Hirohito's birthday approached, Chennault knew that the Japanese would plan an all-out attack in hopes of finishing the AVG for good. He decided that now was the perfect time to lure the Japanese into a false sense of security. To do so, Chennault ordered all P-

¹⁹¹ "Flying Tigers Score Again: Shoot Down 11 Jap Planes; Even Tho Out-Numbered, Didn't Lose A Single Plane," *The Neosho Daily News* (Neosho, MO) April 28, 1942.

40s to patrol the areas most likely to be attacked: Loiwing and Lashio. At Loiwing, he ordered that when the men returned to not come directly to the base but rather when they returned they were to go to Mingshih. Arvid Olson's group headed towards Lashio, while the remaining men under David "Tex" Hill dove on bombers between Lashio and Mandalay. It would not be a good day for the Japanese, as they lost twenty-two Zeros that day. However, the AVG abandoned the Loiwing base of operations as the Japanese advanced on Lashio.¹⁹²

As the Japanese entered Lashio on April 29, Chennault and his men retreated from Loiwing except for Bob Neale and a few men who were to protect the AVG convoy as they moved out of Burma from Paoshan. On May 4, the Japanese bombed Paoshan, recently flooded with refugees. AVG member Charley Bond was the only one to get his P-40 in the air, shooting down two bombers as they left the area. He would not be so lucky as he was severely burned having bailed out of his plane that had been hit by Japanese fighters.¹⁹³ The next day, May 5, the AVG would be prepared. Chennault sent nine P-40s to Yunnayi to wait for further orders. Once he received radio transmission indicating that the Japanese bombers were in the air, he sent the men to Paoshan. The Flying Tigers shot down eight fighters and sailed into the second wave of bombers. The bombers retreated without dropping a single bomb that day.

However, the Japanese were advancing towards the west rim of the Salween Gorge. Chennault knew that if they managed to cross and take Kunming, the only way to get supplies into China would be through Russia. Cut off from supplies meant that the China would collapse, and Japan would have free reign. By this time, the AVG had received a few P-40E planes, which

¹⁹² "American Flying Tigers Strike Back Savagely at Lashio Bases," *Wilmington Morning Star*, Wilmington, NC, May 4, 1942; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 149-150; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 247-248.

¹⁹³ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 162; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 249-250.

were capable of dropping bombs, and while Chennault did not like the idea of bombing the road with refugees on it, he knew that would be the only way to prevent the Japanese from advancing. By May 6, all that stood between the Japanese and crossing the Salween Gorge was the lack of a bridge that had been destroyed. Chennault knew he had to act fast.

As Chennault recalled, “Just after dawn on May 7, a handful of A.V.G. pilots took off to stop the victorious Japanese Army on the brink of the Salween,” something that the British and Chinese Armies had failed to do.¹⁹⁴ Led by David “Tex” Hill, eight P-40s, which included four P-40Es loaded with bombs, headed towards the Salween Gorge. The plan was to dive-bomb the top of the gorge and the side of the road creating landslides to block the Japanese retreat, then they turned to bomb the trucks and strafing the road hitting the Japanese. When the first flight ran out of ammunition, the next group came down and continued the strafing.¹⁹⁵

These attacks went on for four days, and on May 12 Chennault was able to inform Madame Chiang that “the only military traffic along the Burma Road was moving south towards Burma.”¹⁹⁶ Chennault and his A.V.G. had ended the Japanese advance into China along the Burma Road. However, China was cut off from all land communication except through the Silk Road, which ran through Russia. The only option for communication and supplies would be

¹⁹⁴ “200 Jap Soldiers Killed by AVG in Yunnan Strafing: Flying Tigers Make Attacks Along Salween and Burma Road,” *The Evening Star*, Washington, D.C., June 6, 1942; “Series of Defeats Inflicted on Japs: Driven Back to Burma Road; Threat Seen in Indo-China,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, Wilmington, NC, May 18, 1942; Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 165; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 138-140; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 254-255.

¹⁹⁵ *Wings Over China*, “Interview with David Lee “Tex” Hill,” Produced by Susan Yu, MaxMediaAsia, 1999.

¹⁹⁶ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 166.

through the air. The Battle of the Salween Gorge resulted in the Japanese losing 4,500 troops while the AVG achieved its most significant victory.¹⁹⁷

After the battle over the Salween Gorge, the issue of induction into the Air Corps was once again raised. Brigadier General Clayton Bissell, now in charge of air-force units in China, requested a meeting with the men in hopes of making a deal with them. According to Chennault, most of the men were willing to be inducted into the Air Corps provided that they first receive thirty-days furlough home.¹⁹⁸ Bissell, on the other hand, had a different idea; he instead wanted the men to forgo that furlough and stay in China. He told the men why he felt this way going so far as to inform the men, “And for any of you who don’t join the Army, I can guarantee to have your draft boards waiting for you when you step down a gangplank onto United States soil.”¹⁹⁹

It must have been heartbreaking to the old man to have, and I know that he did not approve of it. He wanted to give us home leave because we’ve been out there, we’ve been fighting with such small amount of equipment and so forth. And he felt that we deserved the rest and Bissell and the other higher-ups in the American Air Force wouldn’t listen to Chennault as I’ve heard later how the military was treating us.²⁰⁰

If he wanted the men to revolt, this was the way to do it. Out of two hundred and fifty men, only five pilots and twenty-two ground crew were willing to stay in China indefinitely.

¹⁹⁷ “US Airmen Aid Defence: “Flying Tigers” Tell of Heroic Effort of Governor,” *The Windsor Star* (Windsor, Ontario, Canada), May 16, 1942; “Flying Tigers Strike Hard and Hurl Back Japs,” *Pottsville Republican* (Pottsville, PA), May 16, 1942; “Defiant Chinese Governor Turns Tide Against Japs In Burma Area: Flying Tiger Group Leads Epic Attack,” *Valley Morning Star* (Harlingen, TX), May 17, 1942; *Wings Over China*, “Interview with Dick Rossi,” Produced by Susan Yu, MaxMediaAsia, 1999.

¹⁹⁸ *Wings Over China*, “Interview with Ed Rector,” Produced by Susan Yu, MaxMediaAsia, 1999.

¹⁹⁹ Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 172; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 142; Schultz, *The Maverick War*, 259; *Wings Over China*, “Interview with David Lee “Tex” Hill,” Produced by Susan Yu, MaxMediaAsia, 1999; *Wings Over China*, “Interview with Erik Shilling,” Produced by Susan Yu, MaxMediaAsia, 1999.

²⁰⁰ *Wings Over China*, “Interview with Erik Shilling,” Produced by Susan Yu, MaxMediaAsia, 1999.

By July 4, 1942, the men of the American Volunteer Group, had tallied around three hundred and four downed enemy fighters.²⁰¹ The total varies depending on the source with some placing the number at two hundred and ninety-nine and another indicating that it was two hundred and ninety-seven. Moreover, at midnight, a chapter in history was closed. The AVG was no more. David Lee “Tex” Hill, Ed Rector, Charles Sawyer, Frank Shield, and J. Gilpin Bright would remain with Chennault as part of the 23rd Fighter Squadron when the AVG became part of the Army Air Corps.

As Chennault recalled, “The A.V.G. had a combat record that was never equaled by a Regular Army or Navy fighter group of similar size.”²⁰² Furthermore, he claimed, “The A.V.G. was a unique organization, specially trained for a task it had performed with unbelievable success. Its combat record had proved the soundness of my theories to the satisfaction of everybody except some of my Air Corps colleagues.”²⁰³ Chennault’s tenure as the commander of the American Volunteer Group known as the Flying Tigers proved to the Air Corps that pursuit fighter theories worked.

Through the exceptional leadership of Claire Lee Chennault, the Flying Tigers achieved remarkable results in combat despite the conditions. Though they often lacked critical spare parts for damaged planes, they managed to stay aloft to fight the Japanese. The tactics and strategies that Chennault spent months drilling into the men paid off. Chennault garnered and earned the respect of the men of the AVG as someone who knew how to get the job done. As David “Tex”

²⁰¹ “Flying Tigers Prepare to Join U.S. Force with Score of 284 Jap Planes,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, Wilmington, NC, July 3, 1942; Cornelius and Short, *Ding Hao*, 143.

²⁰² Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, 170.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 170.

Hill said in a 2014 interview in *Wings Over China*, “Chennault impressed me as a guy who really knew what he was doing, and I was right.”²⁰⁴ Dick Rossi said, “Most of the men would do anything Chennault asked.”²⁰⁵ Chennault showed through the success of the AVG that fighter pursuit could successfully defeat a bomber, and they had proved it several times through countless victories in the air. Together, the men of the AVG and Chennault created a lasting legacy of fighter excellence that continues today.

When asked what stood out about her grandfather’s legacy, Nell Calloway, President/CEO Chennault Aviation & Military Museum in Monroe, Louisiana said:

My grandfather never thought anything was impossible. He believed it was possible for men to fight against great odds and win and he passed this belief to the Flying Tigers and gave them the courage to go against impossible odds even if they were 20-1 at times. They never lost a battle in the sky in the 7 months they flew over the skies of China.

To save a nation, Chennault had to stay true to his beliefs and change a system rooted in archaic practices. His critics were loud and many but he stayed the course and defeated an empire all with a group of pilots that was said could not last past three weeks. Chennault's words were prophetic. His aerial tactics were genius. His love, respect and admiration for the Chinese people was not limited to political affiliation or region.²⁰⁶

Today Mrs. Calloway travels often between the U.S. and China speaking about her grandfather and the Flying Tigers. She has found that the Chinese people have a deeper appreciation for Chennault and the Flying Tigers that is often missing in the U.S.

It was not until 1991 that the men of the AVG received official recognition as having served in the Armed Services by the Department of Veteran Affairs. In 1996, they received the

²⁰⁴ *Wings Over China*, “Interview with David Lee “Tex” Hill,” Produced by Susan Yu, MaxMediaAsia, 1999.

²⁰⁵ *Wings Over China*, “Interview with Dick Rossi,” Produced by Susan Yu, MaxMediaAsia, 1999.

²⁰⁶ Nell Calloway (President/CEO Chennault Aviation & Military Museum, Monroe, Louisiana), interviewed by Delynn Burrell, April 26, 2019.

Distinguished Flying Crosses and in 2015 the Congressional Gold Medal.²⁰⁷ Long overdue, the Flying Tigers that flew with Chennault over China and Burma from December 1941 until July 4, 1942, finally received recognition for their service during the war.

²⁰⁷ Jack Kingston, "H.Res. 1594 - 111th Congress (2009-2010): Celebrating the 69th anniversary of the first combat action of the American Volunteer Group and recognizing the contribution of the American Volunteer Group and the 23rd Fighter Group known as the "Flying Tigers" to the victory of the United States in World War II," Congress.gov, September 16, 2010, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/111th-congress/house-resolution/1594/text>; Judy Chu, "H.Res. 802 - 112th Congress (2011-2012): Commemorating the 71st anniversary of the creation of the "Special Air Unit" of the 1st American Volunteer Group (AVG), which became known as the Flying Tigers," Congress.gov, October 11, 2012, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/112th-congress/house-resolution/802/text>; Sam Graves, "H.R.2441 - 114th Congress (2015-2016): AVG Flying Tigers Congressional Gold Medal Act," Congress.gov, May 19, 2015, accessed April 02, 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/2441/text>; Joe Holley, "Charles R. Bond Jr. Dies at 94; Retired Air Force General, Former Flying Tiger," *Los Angeles Times*, September 07, 2009, , accessed April 02, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/local/obituaries/la-me-charles-bond7-2009sep07-story.html>; Pamela Felttus, "Claire Chennault and the Flying Tigers of WorldWar II," Claire Chennault and the Flying Tigers of WorldWar II - U.S. Department of Defense, January 04, 2005, accessed April 02, 2019, <http://archive.defense.gov/home/articles/2005-12/a121905wm1.html>.

Chapter Three: The Black Sheep Take to the Air

On April 2, 1942, Gregory Boyington resigned from the Flying Tigers. Claire Lee Chennault ultimately gave him a dishonorable discharge for leaving while under contract. However, this did not stop Boyington from leaving the Flying Tigers and going back to the Marines. Getting back to the United States was going to be a whole different story. Chennault was the only one who could authorize his return flight home, and he sent a telegram saying to and Air Corps squadron in Karachi, “Am unable to grant permission for Boyington. Suggest you draft Boyington into Tenth Air Force as Second Lieutenant.”²⁰⁸ Boyington still managed to secure passage home on the *USS Brazil* leaving May 30, 1942 and was back in the United States by July 13.²⁰⁹ As the future commander of what possibly could be the Marine’s most significant aviation unit, Boyington’s decision to leave the Flying Tigers in the manner that he did, left much to be desired in a leader. Nevertheless, his success as a leader did not hinge on receiving glowing remarks from Chennault.

Before he left Kunming, Boyington sent a telegram to the Marine headquarters requesting reappointment into the Marines.²¹⁰ What he did not know was whether they had accepted and approved his request. Upon arrival in New York, Boyington visited William

²⁰⁸ Boyington, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, 98; Bruce Gamble, *Black Sheep One: The Life of Gregory Pappy Boyington*, (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2000), 3490, Kindle; Bruce Gamble, *The Black Sheep: The Definitive History of Marine Fighting Squadron 214 in World War II*, (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1998), 2899 Kindle.

²⁰⁹ Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 226. Gamble does not indicate the date the ship left only that it took six weeks to arrive in the U.S., therefore looking at a calendar for 1942 and counting back six weeks it gives the date of May 30, 1942.

²¹⁰ Telegram from Boyington in Kunming, China, requesting his status with the Marine Corps should he resign from the American Volunteer Group and seek to regain his commission; *Official Military Personnel File of Gregory Boyington, 1935 – 1946* [Electronic Record] Official Military Personnel Files, 1905 – 1998; Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, 1775 -, Record Group 127; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD [retrieved from the Access to Archival Databases at www.archives.gov, April 11, 2019].

Pawley, founder of CAMCO, and promptly sent a letter to Captain Frank Beatty, reminding them of the agreement made when military personnel resigned to go to the AVG. After he learned that the process of being recommissioned into the regular Marines would be a long process, he accepted a commission into the reserves and returned home to wait.

While at home awaiting the decision of the Marines, he took advantage of his new found celebrity and accepted several opportunities to speak about his time with the AVG. During these speeches, he often embellished the story, making such claims as “the AVG never had more than eight planes in the air at any given time while facing as many as 150 enemy attackers..”²¹¹ With the Flying Tigers still in China and unable to respond to Boyington’s claims, this allowed him to create a larger-than-life image for himself.²¹² Though embellished the stories were not that far from the truth-- the Japanese often outmanned the Flying Tigers. On August 10, he took a trip to Seattle, where he underwent a flight physical in anticipation that he would be recommissioned into the Marines soon.

The Marines, in the meantime, had received Chennault’s report on Boyington, which was not too favorable. On September 3, Boyington received news that “[r]eappointment to commissioned rank approved. You will be informed when final action is taken.”²¹³ Boyington took this to mean that he would receive a regular commission. What he did not know was that based on Chennault’s report, the Marines had decided to give him a commission in the reserves. Boyington had no choice but to go back to Seattle and ask for his old job parking cars while

²¹¹ Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 230.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 230.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 231.

waiting to receive the call back to active duty.²¹⁴ His patience wearing thin, Boyington decided to send a telegram directly to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy demanding to have an answer as to why his commission was delayed.

His telegram must have worked, for within three days, he had his orders to report for a follow-up physical. Then he was to report to San Diego for aviation duty. By November 17, he reported for duty with the Air Regulating Squadron 2 at North Island.²¹⁵ Air Regulating Squadrons at Naval Air Station (NAS) San Diego saw use as a processing center for Marines heading to the Pacific. Their job called for ensuring that each Marine had his affairs in order and finished his training. There is only one recorded incident where Boyington returned to his old ways while at NAS San Diego. Boyington recalled that one the night he was supposed to be on duty, he took a government vehicle and wrecked it. A friend helped him out by ensuring it quietly went away.²¹⁶ Since alcohol played a significant role in his life since his days at Pensacola, the fact that he managed to record only one incident during his time in San Diego is astonishing. By January 1943, orders for the Pacific in hand, he boarded the *S.S. Lurline* headed for New Caledonia in the South Pacific with a group of replacement pilots.²¹⁷

Boyington had a known issue with alcohol. His initial experience with alcohol occurred while he was in flight school in Pensacola and it had gotten worse in China. Now aboard the *Lurline*, he was back to old habits. According to Historian Bruce Gamble, Henry “Hank” Bourgeois recalled that Boyington had brought a case of scotch on board, claiming it was for a

²¹⁴ Boyington, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, 103; Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 232.

²¹⁵ Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 3638.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 235.

²¹⁷ Boyington, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, 104-105; Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 3677.

friend. However, by the time the ship docked on January 21 in New Caledonia, the scotch was gone. His troubles with alcohol would follow him wherever he went.

As often the case with alcoholics, Boyington did not know when to put the bottle down. He often flew hung over the next day after a night of drinking. In fact, Bourgeois recalled after one night of heavy partying, Boyington had to use pure oxygen to sober himself.²¹⁸ Black Sheep Bruce Matheson recalled Boyington was a “liquor magnet.”²¹⁹ The only time in his life that Boyington remained sober was during his youth and during his time as a prisoner of war. Due to his drinking, he often embellished stories during and after the war. Bourgeois recalled that Boyington drank too much and²²⁰ had a way of finding alcohol even when it was in short supply.²²¹ After passing through New Caledonia, the primary entrance into the Pacific for military personnel and supplies, he headed for Espiritu Santo and arrived on February 1, 1943.

Upon his arrival in Espiritu Santo, Boyington’s assignment was to Marine Air Group (MAG)- 11 where he served as assistant operations officer, a paper-pushing job that did not allow for much flight time.²²² For a combat pilot, this was the worst job imaginable. For Boyington, his disappointment turned to envy as a newly arrived squadron was finishing its combat training in the new Vought F4U-1 Corsair. The Corsair had a two-thousand-horsepower engine built by Pratt and Whitney, which gave it a top speed of four hundred miles per hour. It

²¹⁸ Henry “Hank” Bourgeois, Interview with Seth Paridon, The National WWII Museum, <https://www.ww2online.org/view/henry-hank-bourgeois#segment-1>, November 16, 2006.

²¹⁹ *History Uncovered: The True Story of the Black Sheep Squadron*, Produced by Dan Gagliasso, The History Channel, 2001.

²²⁰ Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 236.

²²¹ *History Uncovered: The True Story of the Black Sheep Squadron*, Produced by Dan Gagliasso, The History Channel, 2001.

²²² Boyington, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, 105; Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 237.

was a beauty in Boyington's eyes-- "the Corsair was a sweet-flying baby if I ever flew one"-- and he longed to fly one.²²³

Six weeks later, Boyington received an assignment to VMF-122 on March 11 as executive officer. Boyington had his chance to be back in the air, but this time he was flying a Grumman F4F Wildcat. However, things had slowed in the South Pacific, as the Japanese had lost significant numbers after the battle for Guadalcanal, so the only flight time Boyington seemed to participate in was flight training.²²⁴ On April 19, Boyington assumed command of VMF-122 when its original commander, Elmer Brackett, resigned. According to Gamble, Captain Hunter Reinburg recalled, "Greg had not changed because I never saw him sober as CO of VMF-122 and I was continually flabbergasted how he could fly so well."²²⁵ However, Boyington never missed a mission. In May, the unit found itself relieved of duty for rest and relaxation (R&R) and sent to Australia. When they returned, they trained in the F4U.

While training in the F4U, Gamble noted that Tony Eisele recalled that Boyington was a naturally aggressive pilot: "When I flew with him, it was never a simple formation flight, but a series of tail chases with loops, rolls, and dogfights."²²⁶ Bourgeois said, "Boyington was an aggressive pilot and that he would fly as his wingman whenever asked."²²⁷ He further recalled that Boyington could not fly in circles. Instead, he had to include loops. Chennault's training had

²²³ Boyington, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, 115; Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 246.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 110; *Ibid.*, 240.

²²⁵ Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 242.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 246.

²²⁷ Henry "Hank" Bourgeois, Interview with Seth Paridon, The National WWII Museum, <https://www.ww2online.org/view/henry-hank-bourgeois#segment-1>, November 16, 2006.

remained with Boyington, and he would continue to use the tactics and strategies that Chennault had taught his AVG men. However, by late May, Boyington was relieved of his command by Joe Smoak, the very same officer who had given Boyington trouble at Pensacola. Like Claire Chennault, Boyington had issues with authority, and Joe Smoak believed that Boyington in command would lead to nothing but trouble.²²⁸

Boyington's next command was VMF-112. The assignment had him effectively pushing papers around again as Smoak had stripped his flight status for an incident on May 29, to which he had visited Brig. Gen. James "Nuts" Moore. Lt. Col. Smoak did not approve of the way Boyington and his men unwinded when not on duty.²²⁹ Again, this goes back to his problems with alcohol, which typically led to him fighting. He had also broken his leg in a wrestling match that night, so flying was not possible at the time. As replacement pilots arrived at Turtle Bay, they were placed in VMF-112 to await pick up by another squadron in need.²³⁰ On August 4, he received the all-clear from the flight surgeon and Smoak had no choice but to reactivate his status.

VMF-214 was not a new unit when Maj. Boyington acquired the unit number; it just happened to be unused since the unit was on leave in Australia at the time. According to Black Sheep historian Bruce Gamble, Four Star Admiral William F "Bull" Halsey, Jr. was in the middle of a campaign and could not afford to lose a fighter unit while they were on leave.²³¹ Maj.

²²⁸ Henry "Hank" Bourgeois, Interview with Seth Paridon, The National WWII Museum, <https://www.ww2online.org/view/henry-hank-bourgeois#segment-1>, November 16, 2006; *History Uncovered: The True Story of the Black Sheep Squadron*, Produced by Dan Gagliasso, The History Channel, 2001.

²²⁹ Gamble, *Black Sheep One*, 236.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 252.

²³¹ Gamble, *The Black Sheep*, 2977.

Boyington approached Brig. Gen. Moore with the idea of forming a unit with the replacement pilots and a few that he poached from others. Many of these men came out of VMF-112. Brig. Gen. Moore approved of this idea and secured it up the chain of command for Boyington.²³²

His unit secured, all the squadron needed was a name. The initial choice of the men was “Boyington’s Bastards,” indicating that they were orphaned pilots without a squadron. However, the public relations office maintained it was not media friendly, leaving the men to find an alternative name. Alternatively, Boyington recalled that it was he who suggested a name change as he did not feel that the unit should be named for a person.²³³ The name Black Sheep was brought up as an alternative with the same meaning, and it was unanimously adopted.²³⁴ What made this squadron unique was that unlike the other squadrons that had formed in the United States, these men formed their squadron in the Pacific Theater.²³⁵ Now that the unit number and name designation had been decided, Boyington turned his attention to preparing his men, some of which had never seen a Japanese Zero, for combat action.

The combat tactics and strategies as compiled by the Naval Air Intelligence Section demonstrated the structure, discipline, and training Boyington gave to the members of the Black Sheep Squadron. No detail was spared, from strafing runs to escorts; he ensured that his men would be the very best naval aviators in the Pacific. Ned Corman recalled that Boyington only

²³² Ibid., 2997.

²³³ Boyington, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, 139.

²³⁴ Frank Walton, *Once They Were Eagles: The Men of the Black Sheep Squadron*, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1986): 554.

²³⁵ Don Hollway, Boyington’s Bastards, *Aviation History* 24 (2014): 24.

flew with aggressive pilots²³⁶ For clarification, Marine pilots were trained and qualified as Naval Aviators by the Navy. A prime example of this aggressive mentality is seen in point number two of his tactics: “Fighter aircraft are designed, and fighter pilots are trained, to fight. If there are enemy aircraft in the air, and contact is not made, something is wrong.”²³⁷ According to Boyington, these were the very same tactics and strategies that Chennault had preached and drilled into the men of the AVG.

Robert McClurg, one of the original members of the Black Sheep Squadron recalled, “We trained through September 12, 1943, which was the official start of our first combat tour.”²³⁸ Part of that education also included learning the tricks of the Japanese fighter pilots who loved to fly in circles, hide behind clouds and use the sun to prevent the American pilots from seeing their approach. McClurg said that to solve this problem, Boyington taught his men to use their thumb to block the sun enabling them to see the Japanese as they came through the clouds.²³⁹ Naval Aviation Historian Barrett Tillman said, “He took a group of disparate pilots who mostly did not know each other, had probably never flown together before and in a matter of just a very few weeks turned them into an extremely potent and effective fighting

²³⁶ *History Uncovered: The True Story of the Black Sheep Squadron*, Produced by Dan Gagliasso, The History Channel, 2001.

²³⁷ *The Combat Strategy and Tactics of Major Gregory Boyington, USMCR*, January 19, 1944, Marine Aircraft, South Pacific, Fleet Marine Force Intelligence Section, 1.

²³⁸ Lt. Col. Robert W. McClurg and Leon Marketos, *On Boyington's Wing: The Wartime Journals of Black Sheep Squadron Fighter Ace Lt. Col. Robert W. McClurg*, (MD: Heritage Books, 2003), 39.

²³⁹ “The Gathering of Black Sheep,” Produced by Jeff Kent, 2000, YouTube.

organization.”²⁴⁰ Boyington also incorporated the use of the Thach Weave, an aerial combat tactic named for John S. Thach.²⁴¹

On September 16, 1943, Major Boyington and his Black Sheep completed their first recorded mission as a unit.²⁴² The mission was comprised of escorting Dauntless and Avenger bombers on a raid of the Bougainville Island. It was also the first time some of these men saw combat action up close and personal. On this particular day, twenty-four Corsair F4Us set out on what was supposed to be an escort mission. Five Black Sheep Members received credit for eleven confirmed kills with another seven probable kills recorded.²⁴³ During this mission, Boyington would gain the title of Ace, a term used to denote a fighter pilot with five or more confirmed kills.

According to Boyington, he first achieved the status under the leadership of Colonel Claire Chenault Flying Tigers.²⁴⁴ However, during this mission over Bougainville, he earned it as Marine taking his total to eleven confirmed kills. The Marines added his total for this mission to what they believed to be his previous total. The remaining Black Sheep also secured the first of

²⁴⁰ *History Uncovered: The True Story of the Black Sheep Squadron*, Produced by Dan Gagliasso, The History Channel, 2001.

²⁴¹ Robert J. Cressman, "Tactical Lessons of Midway," Naval History and Heritage Command, September 12, 2017, , accessed May 13, 2019, <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/t/tactical-lessons-of-midway.html>.

²⁴² This would be their first significant mission as it is the first recorded mission for the Black Sheep Squadron.

²⁴³ The "After Action Report" by Lt. Frank E. Walton is recorded in its entirety by Lt. McClurg in his book *On Boyington's Wing*.

²⁴⁴ Due to lack of official documents and visual verification by someone other than Boyington, and recent Flying Tiger scholarship, Boyington was only officially credited with 3.5 kills. However, the Marines accepted Boyington's version as fact thus he was considered an Ace before he stepped foot into a Corsair F4U Fighter with the Black Sheep. In fact it was the first time they ever considered planes destroyed on the ground as eligible kill shots for ace status.

several kills accredited to them for a total of ten additional Japanese enemy fighter planes shot down in one mission.²⁴⁵

Boyington recorded twelve rules for bomber escorts. The rules included the responsibility of the fighter providing cover, airspeeds concerns, approaching their targeted escort and providing fighter sweeps ahead of the bomber planes reaching their targets.²⁴⁶ One rule, in particular, stands out as the core principle for escort missions: “Fighter divisions should be able to keep together and fighter sections must keep together. The lower the layer in which a particular fighter happens to fly, the more vulnerable his position and the more prepared he must be to operate defensively with his section.”²⁴⁷ These twelve rules laid the foundation for today’s mission of providing close air support, aerial interdiction and armed reconnaissance to Marine and Allied troops.²⁴⁸

On September 27, twelve Corsairs battled fifty Mitsubishi A6M Zeros. The mission was to provide cover for B24 Liberator bombers on a strike mission over Kahili. According to the after-action report, this first mission was poorly organized. The report says that Boyington did not get notification until fifteen minutes prior that morning. After taking off at 11:05 a.m., two of the planes returned to base as one had experienced a malfunction. It left only six planes to provide cover for the bombers. Due to the late notice and take off, Boyington’s division provided fighter sweeps for the bombers. The report further indicates that around 12:10, twenty Zeros

²⁴⁵ “New Ace Downs 5 Jap Zeros in One Engagement,” *Evening Star*, September 21, 1943.

²⁴⁶ *The Combat Strategy and Tactics of Major Gregory Boyington, USMCR*, January 19, 1944, Marine Aircraft, South Pacific, Fleet Marine Force Intelligence Section, 3-5.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁴⁸ “Marine Attack Squadron 214 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing,” 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, accessed April 24, 2019, <https://www.3rdmaw.marines.mil/Units/MAG-13/VMA-214/History/>.

attacked them, and that in all, they encountered about fifty Japanese Zeros. Lt. Walter “Rex” Harris was listed as missing in action.²⁴⁹

Over the next three days, the unit would participate in more escort missions over Kolombangara in the Solomon Islands. Once a British protectorate, it fell into the hands of the Japanese early in the war. The bombing missions led to the sinking of several of their supply ships, which resulted in the Japanese evacuating the island by October 4, 1943. Due to the success of the missions, the United States forces were able to leapfrog over the island to land on Vella Lavella. During one of these missions, an incident of friendly-fire occurred within the Black Sheep, which resulted in the death of Robert Alexander. Though rare, friendly-fire does occasionally occur on the ground, but it is even less common in the air. Boyington would use this incident as a training lesson once back on the ground.²⁵⁰

During a mission to provide cover for Scout Bomber Douglas (SBD) Dauntless dive-bombers on Malabeta Hill on October 4, 1943, VMF-214 had six F4Us in the air against thirty Mitsubishi A6M Zeros, also called Zekes. Per the after-action report, take off was at 11:15, and they were expected to rendezvous with the SBDs around 12:15; however, no contact was made with the bombers. The Black Sheep decided to head north in hopes of meeting up with them. Near Kahili they made contact with thirty Zekes over Moila Point. Within sixty seconds, Boyington had shot down three.²⁵¹ One thing was clear, the hit-and-run method of Boyington and the Black Sheep was working. The hit-and-run method encompassed firing upon the enemy,

²⁴⁹ “Combat Report, 27 September 1943, Frank Walton” as printed in McClurg, *On Boyington’s Wing*, 64.

²⁵⁰ “Statement of First Lieutenant B.L. Tucker Concerning PT Boat Incident, 30 September, 1943” as printed in McClurg, *On Boyington’s Wing*, 69-71.

²⁵¹ “Combat Report, 4 October 1943, Frank Walton” as printed in McClurg, *On Boyington’s Wing*, 74-79.

hitting them, and then diving away. As Walton and Boyington both explained, the Zero can not dive with a Corsair; however, to attempt to dogfight with them was suicide.

The hit-and-run method was the brainchild of Boyington, known as the “Fighter Sweep.”²⁵² As Bruce Matheson recalled, “fighter sweeps were purely air-to-air combats” and the “brainchild of Boyington.”²⁵³ When they had no bombers to cover during a mission, they took it upon themselves to visit Japanese targets and attack. McClurg recalled that Boyington had pressed for the ability to do so as a means of destroying the enemy.²⁵⁴ Fighter pilots such as Boyington did not care as much about escort missions as they did about taking out the enemy, even if it meant taking the fight to them instead of waiting for it to come. The men of the Black Sheep grew accustomed to Boyington’s aggressive tactics.

October 15, 1943, the Black Sheep went out on another escort mission with the B-24s over the Kangu Hill Supply Dump. Two groups of Corsairs led by Hank Bourgeois and Ed Olander left Munga at 10:45, however, Bourgeois’s group returned to base with mechanical issues. Boyington and his flight group were the last to leave as they were to provide rear cover support. The bombers were due to arrive over the target at noon. However, they were fifteen minutes late. As the after-action report showed, “As the bombers passed over the target, the low cover was at 24,000 and the high cover was at 26,000 feet. Twelve to fifteen Zeros attempted to come up underneath the bombers but were engaged at 12,000 feet by Boyington’s flight, and the

²⁵² McClurg, *On Boyington’s Wing*, 80.

²⁵³ *History Uncovered: The True Story of the Black Sheep Squadron*, Produced by Dan Gagliasso, The History Channel, 2001.

²⁵⁴ McClurg, *On Boyington’s Wing*, 80.

enemy never got within 8 to 10 miles of the bombers.”²⁵⁵ By the end of the mission, the Black Sheep had shot down six Zeros with another three probables with no losses to the unit.

The achievements of this mission are astonishing when it is considered that the planes were “hand me downs.”²⁵⁶ These were planes in need of significant overhauls due to extensive usage on the front, but yet the Corsair F4U did not let VMF-214 down. McClurg says the plane was a workhorse, but due to environmental encounters such as the coral dust, the high heat, and humidity, the engines could not keep maximum power.²⁵⁷ Mechanical failure plagued the Black Sheep throughout their entire time as a unit due to these issues, but thanks to the leadership of men like Boyington who led missions to locate severely damaged planes from which to scavenge parts crew chiefs were able to keep them in the air.

Their next mission on October 17 over Kahili Airfield saw sixteen of Boyington’s men in the air taking on forty Zeros. By now the pattern was clear. As with the AVG in China, Boyington’s Black Sheep were significantly overwhelmed by the enemy. What should have resulted in devastating losses for the unit brought them together to accomplish the unbelievable. The mission that day was a fighter sweep and not the typical bomber escort mission they had been assigned to do. Sweeping over Kahili, Boyington took two of the flight groups down in sweeping “S” turns. The anti-aircraft fire was coming from the base, and the Zeros had just taken off. The first engagement with the Zeros occurred around 10,000 feet, while the remaining

²⁵⁵ “Combat Report, 15 October 1943, Frank Walton,” as printed in McClurg, *On Boyington’s Wing*, 81-84.

²⁵⁶ The term hand me downs is used to describe the fact that these airplanes were so damaged that they had been sent from the front for repair. Boyington’s men took control of them and used them for their unit. See: McClurg, *On Boyington’s Wings*, 28.

²⁵⁷ McClurg, *On Boyington’s Wing*, 84.

groups engaged around 18,000 feet. In a forty-minute air fight, the Black Sheep shot down twelve Japanese fighters, eleven Zekes, and one Hap also known as the A6M3-32 which was a newer model of the Zeke.²⁵⁸

The mission of October 18, 1943, was the first time that the Black Sheep outnumbered the enemy. On a routine escort mission in the morning, this time over Ballale, the Black Sheep engaged with just two Japanese Zekes, both of which were shot down by Robert “Bob” McClurg. As the after-action report details, the bombing mission was the best that the Black Sheep had seen thus far, with the bombs “walking right down the Ballale runway.”²⁵⁹ This action might explain why for the first time, the Black Sheep were not outnumbered as there were no planes on the runway. Later that day, they would go out on another mission, this time another fighter sweep over Kahili, where they shot down another eight Zekes with two more probably destroyed.

They would fly a few more escort missions before being grounded in early November for R & R. Their time off was spent in Sydney, Australia where they enjoyed themselves with delicious food as the military food where they were stationed was not the most appetizing. They spent some time sightseeing and socializing with the ladies. When their leave was finished, they even managed to take back some beer, which was hard to come by. McClurg recalled that the beer never made it back to the island. He believed it was in an *History Channel* interview that Ed Olander claimed that due to the beer putting the cargo plane over the weight limit they drank it to

²⁵⁸ “Combat Report, 17 October 1943, Frank Walton,” as printed in McClurg, *On Boyington’s Wing*, 87-88.

²⁵⁹ “Combat Report, 18 October 1943, Frank Walton,” as printed in McClurg, *On Boyington’s Wing*, 94-95.

solve that problem.²⁶⁰ Upon arriving back before the men could return to combat duty, they had to pass a comprehensive physical and mental evaluation to ensure they were still fit for duty. As McClurg recalled, “It took about a week of rest and exercises before Doc Reames finally gave us the green light to fly again.”²⁶¹ While on R & R for nine days in Sydney the men partied a little too hard, so when they returned to the base, it was up to Doc to decide if the men could return to flying.

The second combat tour of the Black Sheep started officially on November 27, 1943. Due to having received replacement pilots for those lost, the unit did training flights before returning to patrol and escort mission in early December. During the first half of December, the Black Sheep spent the majority of the time doing escort and strafing runs. There was not much air-to-air combat during this particular time, and it is unknown as to the reason. However, on December 17, 1943, they were back to fighter sweeps.

On this particular day, the Black Sheep participated in a fighter sweep with seventy-two other planes from varying units over Rabaul. Boyington was adamant that this was too many planes. According to his tactics and strategies:

The larger a striking force, the greater its power, provided that it is not so large as to be unmanageable. At the present time it would seem desirable to restrict sweeps to thirty-six to forty-eight planes, upon the assumption of course that all or very nearly all of them will continue to the target and will participate in such action.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ McClurg, *On Boyington's Wing*, 118.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

²⁶² *The Combat Strategy and Tactics of Major Gregory Boyington, USMCR*, January 19, 1944, Marine Aircraft, South Pacific, Fleet Marine Force Intelligence Section, 3.

These eighty planes took on fifteen enemy planes; the Japanese did not take the bait that day. However, the Black Sheep did get credited with destroying three enemy fighters. Returning to the base, Boyington voiced his concern and opinions to the higher-ups. Telling them that there were too many planes and that if they were going to send that many planes, it needed to be the same plane. Too many different ones would require the pilots to keep checking on planes.²⁶³

As the battle over Rabaul ramped up, Boyington and his men were in high spirits. On December 23, 1943, the men participated in the strike on Rabaul as well as the fighter sweep over the same area. The fighter sweep started an hour later. However, it started a little earlier than planned. The strike on Rabaul, as indicated in the after-action report, claimed that “left the town of Rabaul smiling and set several fires in the harbor.”²⁶⁴ The early start was deemed okay due to protecting the bombers as they left the area. The Black Sheep shot down twelve enemy planes, with Boyington snagging four of those to take his total for the war up to twenty-four, just two away from Major Joe Foss’s record of twenty-six.²⁶⁵ The press pressured Boyington over when he would tie or break Foss’s record.

Boyington was becoming more aggressive with his tactics each time he took to the air, and the men became concerned. On Christmas Eve, Lt. Bragdon told Boyington, “Listen, Gramps, we all want to see you break the record, but we don’t want you going up there and getting killed doing it.”²⁶⁶ Boyington, of course, understood their concern, but in typical

²⁶³ “Combat Report 17 December 1943, Frank Walton,” as printed in McClurg, *On Boyington’s Wing*, 122-124.

²⁶⁴ “Combat Report, 23 December 1943, Frank Walton,” as printed in McClurg, *On Boyington’s Wing*, 134.

²⁶⁵ “Boyington Bag at 24 Nears Plane Record,” *New York Times*, December 27, 1943; “Combat Report, 23 December 1943, Frank Walton,” as printed in McClurg, *On Boyington’s Wing*, 134.

²⁶⁶ Walton, *Once They Were Eagles*, 1998.

Boyington fashion, he responded, “Don’t worry about me. They can’t kill me. If you guys ever see me going down with 30 Zeros on my tail, don’t give me up. Hell, I’ll meet you in a San Diego bar six months after the war, and we’ll have a drink for old time’s sake.”²⁶⁷ The men of the Black Sheep Squadron could not have predicted that in just a few days he would be gone.

On January 3, 1944, in one last mission over Rabaul, Boyington would go missing. The mission, a fighter sweep over Rabaul, pitted eight of the Black Sheep along with twenty F4Us and twenty F6Fs from other squadrons against an enemy contingent of ten to twelve Zekes. The enemy lost two that day, but the Black Sheep changed forever when Boyington went down. That afternoon and for several days afterward, the Black Sheep searched for their leader. As McClurg noted, “in the days immediately after January 2, the Black Sheep, who were previously known as aggressive, antagonistic fighters became demons.” McClurg did not think that this was an increase in the effort but rather because they had a decrease in concern for themselves.²⁶⁸ The men of VMF-214 took their fearless leader’s disappearance hard. It drove them to search aggressively for Boyington until they were ordered to resume normal operations.

Their second tour ended on January 8, 1944, though they would return after R & R for one more tour under the leadership of a different commander. Not much is said about that tour as it was relatively quiet in the region. Eventually, the Black Sheep were separated and sent off to different units or returned home, finished with the war. The unit would reorganize near Santa Barbara at Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Goleta on January 29, 1944. They deployed on

²⁶⁷ Walton, *They Were Once Eagles*, 1998. In fact, Boyington would live up to this prediction. The Japanese did not reveal they had Boyington as a Prisoner of War. However, when the camp he was located in was liberated it was discovered that he was indeed alive. He would meet up with his “boys” as he referred to them at a bar in San Diego upon returning home.

²⁶⁸ McClurg, *On Boyington’s Wing*, 163.

February 4, 1945, in support of the operations against Okinawa and Japan on the *USS Franklin*. Sadly, on March 19 the *USS Franklin* went down, losing seven hundred and seventy-two men including thirty-two Black Sheep, when a Japanese bomber attacked it.²⁶⁹ It would be the last mission in support of World War II for the Black Sheep.

Even though the nation mourned Boyington as if he were deceased, the Marines had listed him as MIA.²⁷⁰ The Japanese for their part did not reveal that they had the celebrated pilot as a prisoner of war. Gregory Boyington was liberated from a Prisoner of War camp on August 28, 1945.²⁷¹ Twenty of his Black Sheep were waiting for him when he debarked from the plane in Oakland, California. They settled for San Francisco instead of the promised drink in San Diego.²⁷² Boyington recalled that out of all the gifts given to him upon arriving back in the U.S., the one gift that meant anything to him was a gold watch from his boys. They had it engraved: "To Gramps from his Black Sheep."²⁷³ Boyington kept his promise and returned to the men who meant so much to him.

²⁶⁹ "Marine Attack Squadron 214 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing," 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, accessed April 24, 2019, <https://www.3rdmaw.marines.mil/Units/MAG-13/VMA-214/History/>.

²⁷⁰ "War Stands Still At Air Base As Boyington Fails to Return," *The Associated Press*, January 9, 1944, Marine Corps Historical Department, Quantico, VA; "Entire Nation Salutes Its Greatest Air Hero," *Home News*, (New Brunswick, N.J.), January 10, 1944, Marine Corps Historical Department, Quantico, VA.; Jessie Griessler, "Made First Flight At Eight, Gregory Boyington Missing After Bagging 26th Jap," *Independent* (Ashland, KY), January 12, 1944, Marine Corps Historical Department, Quantico, VA .

²⁷¹ *August 29, 1945, Newsreel - Major "Pappy" Boyington Is Found Alive*. United News Company. 1945. YouTube.

²⁷² "Pappy Boyington Is Back," *Washington Post*, September 13, 1945, Marine Corps Historical Department, Quantico, VA; "Pappy Boyington Reunited With The Old Gang," *New York Times*, September 13, 1945, Marine Corps Historical Department, Quantico, VA; Jean Kapel, "This One's On Me Says Boyington Keeping Promise," *Times Herald*, (San Francisco), September 13, 1945, Marine Corps Historical Department, Quantico, VA.

²⁷³ Boyington, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, 321.

The record for the Black Sheep under Gregory Boyington reflected two combat tours. The two tours combined for a total of four months in the theater that equated to two hundred combat missions for a combined total of 4,195 combat flying hours. Alongside Gregory Boyington, seven of them would earn the status of Ace. Unlike the Flying Tigers, the Black Sheep earned immediate recognition from their military superiors and their country when they received a Presidential Unit Citation in 1944. The citation reads, “Frequently outnumbered but never outfought, Marine Fighting Squadron Two Hundred Fourteen achieved an outstanding combat record which reflects the highest credit upon its skilled pilots, air and ground crews and the United States Naval Service.”²⁷⁴ The Black Sheep Squadron was the first Marine Aviation unit to receive the Presidential Unit Citation propelling them into the history books.

Although the men knew Boyington’s propensity for alcohol, they still respected the man they called Pappy. Robert McClurg recalled that having lost his father at the tender age of four, Boyington in many ways had become a surrogate father to him, not allowing him to fly combat missions until he was thoroughly satisfied McClurg could handle the pressure.²⁷⁵ Through various oral histories, it is evident they had a deep respect for him and his capabilities to fly. Each of the surviving stories all told of how they would fly with Boyington any day regardless of whether he had drunk all night the night before. To them, he demonstrated brilliance and extraordinary talent in the air. His presence and leadership helped the men of the unit develop a strong sense of *esprit de corps*. He dedicated himself to teaching and training the men to fly in dangerous situations. Each mission had a lesson that they could learn from once back on the

²⁷⁴ *Presidential Unit Citation 1944*, VMF-214 Unit History 1943-1944, National Archives.

²⁷⁵ *History Uncovered: The True Story of the Black Sheep Squadron*, Produced by Dan Gagliasso, The History Channel, 2001.

ground. Those teaching sessions became the foundation for today’s “Friday’s Lessons Learned” in which the current Black Sheep members come together to learn from each other after the mission is completed.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁶ Lieutenant Colonel Keith Bucklew (Executive Officer VMA-214, Yuma, Arizona), interviewed by Delynn Burrell, March 20, 2019.

Chapter Four: History is More than Memories

If the Flying Tigers and the Black Sheep Squadron are legends of World War II aviation, their stories and the ways that people, places, and ideas embrace and utilize them are their legacies. As the American people struggled to find hope in a war that seemed unwinnable in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, the Flying Tigers gave them a glimmer of light in dark times. As newspaper reports of the daring men in China overcoming what seemed like insurmountable obstacles flowed into the United States, it generated a sense that America could defeat the enemy.²⁷⁷ The *Abilene Reporter-News* reported that the British RAF pilots declared them “magnificent and doing the most impressive fighting they had seen to date.”²⁷⁸ Between January 26-28, 1942, newspapers from Michigan, California, Ohio, Indiana, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Montana, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Alabama, Colorado, Pennsylvania, Florida, Kansas, Nevada, Texas and New Mexico, to name just a few, all retold the story of how the Flying Tigers in China heroically defeated the Japanese.

Just like the Flying Tigers and Black Sheep found inspiration in the early aviators such as Wilbur and Orville Wright, Eddie Rickenbacker, and William “Billy” Mitchell, Claire Chennault and Gregory Boyington would inspire those who came long after them. Once often thought of as

²⁷⁷ “The Colonel’s Flying Tigers,” *Coos Bay Times*, (Marshfield and North Bend, Oregon), December 30, 1941, 2; “Volunteer U.S. Airman Reports Japs On Run,” *The Gettysburg Times* (Gettysburg, PA), December 29, 1941, 6; “Washington C.H. Boys with Flying Tigers in Burma,” *The Record-Herald* (Washington Court House, OH), March 13, 1942; Al Williams, “The Flying Tigers,” *The Pittsburgh Press* (Pittsburgh, PA), May 19, 1942, 17; “The Tigers With Wings,” *Coos Bay Times* (Marshfield, OR) January 28, 1942; “Shawno Greets Flying Tiger,” *The Green Bay Press-Gazette* (Green Bay, WI), July 20, 1942, 9; Kleiner, *The Flying Tigers*, 3.

²⁷⁸ “American Volunteers Called ‘Flying Tigers’ By Chinese After Spectacular Air Victories,” *Abilene Reporter-News* (Abilene, TX), January 28, 1942, 13.

a boring class in school, history is now finding new and exciting avenues to bring it to life.²⁷⁹ Some of the various ways that individuals are now gaining a better knowledge of history are through movies, television shows, and both video and board games. A prime example of this is the video game, *Assassin's Creed*, which has players battling during the Crusades, the American Revolution, Renaissance Italy, Egypt and in newer versions the Peloponnesian War.²⁸⁰ Online war games that simulate air-to-air combat are also quickly gaining popularity, especially among military veterans.

Starting in 1942, the story of the Flying Tigers was available to the American public through various news media outlets such as newspapers and magazines. Similarly, in 1942, the Flying Tigers made their foray into pop culture with the release of the film, *The Flying Tigers* starring John Wayne, John Carroll, and Anna Lee.²⁸¹ Former Flying Tiger ground crew members, Larry Moore and Ken Sanger served as technical advisers for the production. However, as historian Daniel Ford, explains Chennault started a letter campaign to get them removed, and Republic Studios obliged.²⁸² Moore and Sanger had resigned from the Flying Tigers before their contract expired and Chennault viewed them as dishonorable.

According to a review in the *New York Times*, the movie is more of an adventure-based romantic movie with little focus on the true Flying Tigers. The love story overshadows the factual information of the Flying Tigers similarly as it did in *Pearl Harbor* starring Ben Affleck.

²⁷⁹ Grant Addison, "As History Flourishes as Entertainment, It Withers within the Academy," *Washington Examiner*, April 05, 2019, accessed April 21, 2019, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/history-as-seen-on-tv>.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ "Wayne and Carroll Star in 'Flying Tigers'," *The Cumberland News* (Cumberland, MD), December 2, 1942, 13.

²⁸² Ford, *Flying Tigers*, 4833.

The review gave credit to John Wayne for his portrayal of the unit commander. The critic recognized that “Mr. Wayne is the sort of fellow who inspires confidence and he does much to keep the film on a fairly even keel.”²⁸³ Overall, the movie set John Wayne up as the leading man of the 40s for war movies. Throughout the last six to seven years, stories have appeared indicating a renewed interest in producing a new Flying Tigers movie or mini-series, one based more on the real history of the unit, yet for whatever reasons one has failed to materialize.²⁸⁴ Given Hollywood’s tendency to romanticize historical movies the likelihood that a more realistic one finds its way into production is slim. However, with the emergence of movies like *American Sniper*, *Dunkirk*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Lone Survivor*, *Letters from Iwo Jima*, and *Hacksaw Ridge*, it remains a strong possibility that with the right writers and producers, an accurate depiction of the Flying Tigers is indeed possible.

The Black Sheep Squadron was the first and only military unit to receive a television show about them in 1976 with the release of *The Black Sheep Squadron*, starring Robert Conrad.²⁸⁵ Based on Boyington’s book, the series inaccurately portrayed the men as misfits awaiting court-martial when he put the unit together. Historian Bruce Gamble said that “the

²⁸³ “At the Capitol,” *New York Times*, October 23, 1942.

²⁸⁴ “John Woo to Direct 'Flying Tigers' As Two-Part Feature,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 23, 2013; Ken Guidry, “John Woo's WWII Epic 'Flying Tigers' To Arrive As Feature Film & Extended, 6-Hour Miniseries,” *IndieWire*, April 23, 2013, accessed April 21, 2019, <https://www.indiewire.com/2013/04/john-woos-wwii-epic-flying-tigers-to-arrive-as-feature-film-extended-6-hour-miniseries-99071/>; Justin Kroll, “Skydance, Alibaba Team Up on World War II Movie 'Flying Tigers',” *Variety*, April 07, 2016, accessed April 21, 2019, <https://variety.com/2016/film/asia/flying-tigers-skydance-alibaba-american-volunteer-group-1201747712/>; Dominic Patten, “Colin Callender Takes Off With 'The Flying Tigers' TV Series,” *Deadline*, January 22, 2013, accessed April 21, 2019, <https://deadline.com/2013/01/colin-callender-the-flying-tigers-tv-series-playground-entertainment-410136/>; Jim Vejvoda, “Harrison Ford May Take Flight for Flying Tigers TV Project,” *IGN*, August 29, 2012, accessed April 21, 2019, <https://www.ign.com/articles/2012/08/29/harrison-ford-may-take-flight-for-flying-tigers-tv-project>; “Skydance Media and Alibaba Pictures Partner to Fund Flying Tigers Feature Film,” *Entertainment Close-up* 13 April 2016, *Business Insights: Global*, 4 May 2019.

²⁸⁵ “The Gathering of Black Sheep,” Produced by Jeff Kent, 2000, YouTube.

show was highly fictionalized as far as nurses and all the beer drinking and booze they were able to put away every time they flew.”²⁸⁶ Black Sheep member Bruce Matheson felt that if people disregarded everything in the show except what went on in the air, then “the show was truly a wonderful show.”²⁸⁷ In an article in the *Stars and Stripes*, Intelligence Officer Frank Walton, said, “I understand Hollywood hokes things up, but that’s no reason to call everyone misfits, screwups and foulball.”²⁸⁸ Boyington defended the show in the same article, claiming “If you put together a half a dozen of the *Baa Baa Black Sheep* episodes and balanced them out, it would be 90 percent accurate.”²⁸⁹ In Boyington’s mind, his memory was not far from the truth. The one thing the show did get correct-- the Corsair.

NBC Studios, which produced *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, later renamed *The Black Sheep Squadron* when it went into syndication, used real Corsairs for the series. Five of the planes saw combat, two were air race champions, and two flew a race lap without competing.²⁹⁰ The series lasted two seasons on NBC before receiving its cancellation notice due to a combination of economics and anger over the inaccurate portrayal of the unit. Robert Conrad also believed that the show received unwanted attention from the Women Against Violence On Television, though

²⁸⁶ “The Gathering of Black Sheep,” Produced by Jeff Kent, 2000, YouTube.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ “Pappy’s” Boys Deplore TV Show,” *Stars and Stripes*, November 26, 1976.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Stephen Chapis, “Poor Little Lambs: The Aircraft From The TV Series ‘Baa Baa Black Sheep’,” in *Warbirds Digest*, (Huntington, IN, July/August 2013), 57.

this assumption on Conrad's part appears to be conjecture as no evidence can be found indicating that there was ever any protest against the show by this group.²⁹¹

Video games have likewise put forth the stories of the Flying Tigers and the Black Sheep Squadron. They have given today's generation a glimpse into the past by allowing them to simulate combat flights. In 2012, the game *World of Warplanes* debuted online. A popular addition to the extremely popular *World of Tanks* and *War of Warships* franchise, *World of Warplanes* is an online gaming system that allows the individual to interactively fight in the air-to-air combat scenarios using various aircraft of World War II. While much of the game is free to play, provided the player registers with the site, there are certain areas that the player must purchase, such as the ability to play as the members of the Black Sheep Squadron.

Xbox, which is produced by Microsoft created a variation for the Flying Tigers entitled: *Flying Tigers: Shadows Over China*. The game is solely based on actual missions of the Flying Tigers and is not available for free. Released in January 2018, the game is a single-player game and is available for computers as well. Critic reviews of the game range from fairly positive to somewhat negative with the most significant drawback being the lack of an online community presence within the game that would allow players to compete against each other.²⁹² Through these video games, players can take on the roles and missions of the Black Sheep and Flying Tigers as they soar through the air fighting enemy aircraft and using the tactics and strategies of both Chennault and Boyington.

²⁹¹ Robert Conrad and Larry Manetti "Black Sheep Question and Answer Session" at Hollywood Show, Los Angeles, January 12, 2013, YouTube.

²⁹² "Flying Tigers: Shadows Over China," Metacritic, January 12, 2018, accessed April 22, 2019, <https://www.metacritic.com/game/xbox-one/flying-tigers-shadows-over-china/critic-reviews>.

Pop culture has influenced generations of people; it brings stories from the past to life in ways that might not have otherwise reached the public. History today is no longer found just in the classroom. Instead, millions of people around the world are looking to television, movies, and video games to shed light on what once was an academic field. A quick browse through formats such as Hulu, Netflix, and Amazon Prime and one can find programming on Rome, seventeenth-century France and the English monarchy. While some of this programming is factual, some of it is romanticized history.

According to the deputy editor of the *Washington Examiner Magazine*, Grant Addison, “Even in our age of endless superhero movies and franchise reboots, historical dramas and biographical feature films continue to be a mainstay at the megaplex.” Addison continues by pointing out that five historical dramas have taken home best picture from the Academy Awards since 2010.²⁹³ The logic behind this, Addison argues, is that the academic arena is not concerned with “how history is taught and which topics are being studied or ignored.”²⁹⁴ If most of the history entertainment currently available to the viewer is as Addison claims, based on political, military, and diplomatic history, then the academic world needs to take heed and tie into their classrooms the stories that students desire to learn. The histories of men such as Chennault and Boyington should be pushed forward into the classrooms, where they can be aptly taught and not the television or movie screens where they are often altered to make money.

Another way the legacy of the Flying Tigers and the Black Sheep Squadron remains today is through the current inceptions of the units. Currently based at Moody Air Force Base in

²⁹³ Grant Addison, "As History Flourishes as Entertainment, It Withers within the Academy," *Washington Examiner*, April 05, 2019, accessed April 21, 2019, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/history-as-seen-on-tv>.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

Valdosta, Georgia, the Flying Tigers of the 23rd Wing continue the mission of excellence and service to the country. In 2017, Moody hosted the 75th Reunion of the Flying Tigers, with two of the original members in attendance. As their numbers dwindle, the focus now turns to honor generations of Flying Tigers since World War II.²⁹⁵ In 2012, the 23rd Wing received approval to resume the use of the 1957 Flying Tigers patch to return to honoring the legacy of the original Flying Tigers.²⁹⁶

As part of MAG- 13, VMF-214 currently makes their home base in Yuma, Arizona. When the Black Sheep are not flying, they can often be found in the “Sheep’s Pen” where they meet regularly to continue Boyington’s practice of learning from each mission. In 2011, they hosted a reunion of the surviving Black Sheep Squadron where they celebrated and honored the legacy of Boyington, without whom there would be no VMA-214.²⁹⁷

When the Flying Tigers disbanded on July 4, 1942, those who chose to remain in China with Chennault received induction into the Air Corps as part of the 23rd Fighter Group in the Chinese Air Task Force (C.A.T.F.).²⁹⁸ The C.A.T.F. fell under the 10th Air Force in the beginning. With the disbandment of the Flying Tigers on July 4, 1942, the promised

²⁹⁵ Andrea Jenkins, "Flying Tigers Celebrate 75 Years," Moody Air Force Base, March 14, 2017, , accessed April 27, 2019, <https://www.moody.af.mil/News/Features/Display/Article/1112599/flying-tigers-celebrate-75-years/>.

²⁹⁶ Melissa K. Mekpongsatorn, "Moody Changes 23d Wing Emblem, Returns to Heritage," Moody Air Force Base, June 05, 2012, , accessed April 27, 2019, <https://www.moody.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/209796/moody-changes-23d-wing-emblem-returns-to-heritage/>.

²⁹⁷ Graham J. Benson, "Original Black Sheep Impart History to the New Herd," Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, April 21, 2011, accessed April 27, 2019, <https://www.mcasyma.marines.mil/News/Article/550214/original-black-sheep-impart-history-to-the-new-herd/>; Phil Myers, "A Reunion Of Legends," PhotoRecon, May 16, 2011, <http://photorecon.net/vma-214-black-sheep-reunion/>.

²⁹⁸ Claire Chennault, *Plan for Employment of China Air Force Task Force and Attached Services*, Claire Lee Chennault’s Military Personnel File, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 208.

replacements failed to materialize in China. Instead what Chennault received in their place was a few “dozen green pilots and twenty clerks and mechanics.”²⁹⁹ Additionally, the Army failed to supply the promised fighter planes, vehicles, radios, or other equipment. Supplies were dependent upon air transport from India. Bob Neale led the 23rd Fighter Group until its commander Colonel Robert Scott, Jr. took command on July 19.

Chennault’s task as he saw it was to keep the India-China Ferry Route open while disrupting the Japanese’s operations in China. The one advantage he had that no other Air Corps commander did--experience. His Chinese mechanics had worked on the P-40s for a year; they knew the equipment and could fix it in a relatively short time. He also had his air warning system in place along with the net that helped locate downed pilots. Additionally, he previously built a system of communications that allowed him to target the Japanese bases whenever he deemed necessary.

On March 10, 1943, Chennault took command of the newly organized and designated Fourteenth Air Force. With the 23rd Fighter Group under its command, the 14th Air Force assumed the name The Flying Tigers.³⁰⁰ Under the new organization, the First Squadron became the 74th Fighter Squadron, the Second Squadron became the 75th Fighter Squadron and the Third Squadron became the 76th Fighter Squadron March 10, 1943, through December 1945, the 14th Air Force maintained the legacy of the Flying Tigers using fighter and bomber squadrons. They

²⁹⁹ Samson, *The Flying Tiger*, 209.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 238.

established a kill ratio of 7.7 to 1.³⁰¹ Their success led to Chennault receiving the Distinguished Flying Cross. The citation in part reads:

As commander of the American Volunteer Group in Burma and China, later of the China Air Task Force and currently of the Fourteenth U.S. Air Force he has personally directed attacks against numerically superior enemy forces, deploying his meager personnel and material with tactical brilliance to obtain maximum efficiency and results.³⁰²

He also received the Distinguished Service Medal in 1945 for his service with the Fourteenth Air Force.³⁰³

After World War II, the Flying Tigers faced inactivation and reactivation several times until they finally received a permanent reactivation in 1992 at Pope Air Force Base in Fayetteville, North Carolina.³⁰⁴ In March 2002, the unit “landed the first fighter plane inside Afghanistan.”³⁰⁵ In 2006, the 347th Rescue Wing joined with the 23rd Wing to bring a new dimension to the Flying Tigers.³⁰⁶ In 2007, the Wing relocated to Moody Air Force Base. Today’s Flying Tigers have continuously participated in Operations Enduring Freedom, Southern Watch, and Iraqi Freedom. Between 2008 and 2009, the units that comprise the 23rd

³⁰¹ Colonel Jennifer Short (Wing Commander of the 23rd Wing, Moody Air Force Base), Interviewed by Delynn Burrell, January 20, 2019.

³⁰² War Department, Washington D.C., *General Orders 72*, 28 August 1945, Claire Lee Chennault’s Military Personnel File, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

³⁰³ Claire Chennault, *Plan for Employment of China Air Force Task Force and Attached Services*, Claire Lee Chennault’s Military Personnel File, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

³⁰⁴ "23rd Fighter Group," Moody Air Force Base, accessed April 23, 2019, <https://www.moody.af.mil/About-Us/Units/23d-Wing/23d-Fighter-Group/>; Colonel Jennifer Short (Wing Commander of the 23rd Wing, Moody Air Force Base), Interviewed by Delynn Burrell, January 20, 2019.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Schloeffel, A1C Eric (2 October 2006), "Ceremony Brings Historic 23rd Wing to Moody," United States Air Force Public Affairs.

Wing logged a combined 28,000 combat hours.³⁰⁷ Throughout the years, the Wing received multiple awards, including the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award and the Meritorious Unit Award. According to Colonel (Col.) Jennifer Short, “On 18 May 2018, the 74th Fighter Squadron was awarded the Gallant Unit Citation for extraordinary heroism in support of Operation Inherent Resolve.”³⁰⁸ The Wing continues to live up to the extraordinary and exemplified example of the original Flying Tigers.

According to Col. Short, the Flying Tigers’ legacy lies in Chennault. “He is the legacy. That is the leader you aspire to be; you strive to be bold and courageous. I hope to carry the legacy by ensuring Airmen have everything they need to get the job done and stoking a culture that breeds bold and courageous leaders that push the envelope.”³⁰⁹ In response to the notion that some of the original Flying Tigers felt that the current inception should not use the name Flying Tigers, Col. Short responded that “the past and present men and women of the 23rd Wing have earned the right to be called a Flying Tiger.”³¹⁰ Moreover, if the numerous awards and citations are any indication, then the current pilots most definitely has earned the right to consider themselves part of the legendary unit, for they indeed are carrying on the legacy that Chennault and his men created when they voluntarily went to China to fight an unwinnable war.

The Black Sheep Squadron, unlike the Flying Tigers, did not return home as civilians. Instead, they went to various other squadrons in need of replacement pilots. With Boyington’s classification as MIA, the unit had no leader until February 1944. Placed then under the

³⁰⁷ Colonel Jennifer Short (Wing Commander of the 23rd Wing, Moody Air Force Base), Interviewed by Delynn Burrell, January 20, 2019.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

command of Henry Miller and Stan Bailey, the men of VMF-214 did one last tour in the Solomon Islands. Under Miller, the tour took on a different structure. Gone was the aggressive style of Boyington, and in its place remained more reconnaissance, strafing, and escort missions. McClurg recalled that they spent more time escorting flying boats to pick up downed pilots.³¹¹ The flying boat McClurg referenced in all likelihood was the PBV-5A Catalina, which saw use in World War II by all branches of the military and operated in several functions including search and rescue.³¹²

The third and final combat tour of the Black Sheep ended at the end of April 1944.³¹³ McClurg's recollection varies greatly with that of Intelligence Officer Frank Walton, who recalled that the VMF-214 number returned to the states before March 20, 1944. Once in the states, the new pilots placed in the unit "proudly adopted the famous Black Sheep name."³¹⁴ The original fifty-one members of the Black Sheep scattered. Some returned to the U.S., while others went to Bougainville or Green Island.³¹⁵

World War II did not see the inactivation of VMF-214 unlike the Flying Tigers of the Twenty-Third Group. When the Korean War broke out, the men of VMF-214 were the first Marine Fighter Squadron launching from the *USS Sicily* into Inchon.³¹⁶ Between the Korean and

³¹¹ McClurg, *On Boyington's Wing*, 172.

³¹² "Catalina Aircraft - Description – Specifications," catalinaflying.org.au.

³¹³ McClurg, *On Boyington's Wing*, 173.

³¹⁴ Walton, *Once They Were Eagles*, 2200.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ "Marine Attack Squadron 214 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing," 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, accessed April 24, 2019, <https://www.3rdmaw.marines.mil/Units/MAG-13/VMA-214/History/>.

Vietnam Wars, the unit's designation of VMF changed to VMA (Marine Attack Squadron). They actively participated in Vietnam, where "[t]he Black Sheep flew 14,000 hours during 13,000 combat sorties and dropped more than 10,000 tons of ordnance. For their service, VMA-214 was awarded the Navy Unit Commendation with Bronze Star."³¹⁷ In April 1967, they returned to California, where the unit became an operational training squadron.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the unit received numerous awards, including the Lawson H.M. Sanderson Award for Attack Squadron of the Year in 1982, and they made history when they received it a second time in 1987.³¹⁸ They have repeatedly answered America's call in times of need, participating in significant operations such as Operations Southern Watch, Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, along with Humanitarian missions. Today's VMA-214 Black Sheep Squadron continues the legacy of excellence started by Major Gregory Boyington and the original members of the unit.

According to Lieutenant Colonel (Lt. Col.) Keith Bucklew, currently, Executive Officer of VMA-214, the most crucial contribution of Boyington and his men to the unit deals with their ability to freely accept, discuss and remedy mistakes made in the air:

I feel Pappy's focus on training aviators throughout combat and conducting lessons learned to ensure past mistakes are not repeated have contributed greatly to the modern Black Sheep. During WWII aviation training and standardization was very rudimentary and mostly done in CONUS (*Continental United States*) very rapidly to get combat trained aviators to theater very quickly.³¹⁹ This resulted in high mishap rates and losses. Since the Black Sheep were such a close-knit unit, naturally due to Pappy's leadership style, they freely shared mistakes, victories, and lessons learned to ensure they remained sharp. To this day, we

³¹⁷ "Marine Attack Squadron 214 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing," 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, accessed April 24, 2019, <https://www.3rdmaw.marines.mil/Units/MAG-13/VMA-214/History/>.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Words in Italics added by author for clarification for the non-military reader.

conduct Friday Lessons Learned events every week in our room we call the “The Sheep’s Pen.” In this venue, rank is left at the door, and we solely focus on how to be better aviators learning from the week’s flights and simulators. This is a venue where Marines can freely convey their thoughts and concerns to make everyone better. Pappy started this tradition that we continue today.³²⁰

Leaving rank at the door and allowing the men of the unit to come together, work out situations that went wrong, and find solutions allows for the growth of their squadron. For Lt. Col. Bucklew, the opportunity to learn lessons from the missions carried out was a vital tenant of Boyington’s leadership.³²¹

After careful analysis and studying of both units, the conclusion established that the two shared similarities and yet vast differences makes them stand out from each other. The Flying Tigers had Claire Lee Chennault, a man who demonstrated a strong faith in the power of the defensive-pursuit theory when his superiors felt that bombers were the future. The Black Sheep Squadron had for its commander Gregory “Pappy” Boyington, a former Flying Tiger who learned at the hand of Chennault. Both men enjoyed taking risks, both advocated a fighter-first pursuit theory, and both men had a problem with authority. While Chennault’s theories focused more on a defensive strategy, Boyington’s strategy appeared to be a more offensive in nature. The success rates of both units validated their ability to take on the enemy, winning the majority of their air-to-air battles while losing relatively few men.

Chennault believed that fighter planes still had a role in future wars. He maintained that if appropriately used, fighters could defeat the enemy. His strategy called for utilizing fighting in pairs rather than the traditional one-on-one fighter tactics of the past. The traditional view to

³²⁰ Lieutenant Colonel Keith Bucklew (Executive Officer VMA-214, Yuma, Arizona), interviewed by Delynn Burrell, March 20, 2019.

³²¹ *bid.*

Chennault was archaic and outdated. One-on-one fighting led to more deaths of skilled pilots, which in Chennault's estimation could be catastrophic the next time the United States went to war. Rather, he proposed that instead of attempting to take on the enemy with a single plane, the idea was to fight in pairs. In Chennault's view, the idea was to attack with one coming from above and one below firing rapidly then diving and coming back again until the enemy fell from the skies.

Boyington's tactical strategy involved not only fighting in pairs, something he learned from Chennault, but fighter sweeps. In fighter sweeps, Boyington encouraged his men to continually engage the enemy by taking the fight to directly to them. The fighter sweep is an offensive tactic that involves seeking out enemy aircraft and targets in a designated location. For the men of the Black Sheep Squadron, fighter sweeps topped the list as a personal favorite type of mission to fly. The reason for this appears to be that it broke up the monotony of escort missions.

The numbers speak for themselves. Often outnumbered six to one the men of the Flying Tigers tallied approximately three hundred and four enemy planes destroyed, while the Black Sheep Squadron destroyed approximately one hundred and ninety-seven. These numbers do not reflect the number of ships and ground targets effectively destroyed, nor does it reflect the time in combat or the number of active pilots the unit had available.

If the sign of a good leader is the ability to instill loyalty in their men, then Chennault and Boyington exemplified this to the letter. Though Chennault may have had an issue or two with his men when it came to the notion of the dreaded morale missions, once they learned of his induction into the Army Air Corps, they understood that he was merely following orders.

Another pressing matter dealt with the induction into the U.S. Air Corps. Had the U.S. Air Corps

willingly allowed the men to take leave and visit their families before being inducted into the military service, they would have gladly followed anywhere Chennault led them. According to David “Tex” Hill, “Chennault loved us, and we loved him.” There could be no doubt that the men of the Flying Tigers held Chennault in high regard.³²²

Gregory Boyington likewise held the loyalty of his men as evidenced by their aggressive search for him after he failed to return to base after the mission of January 2, 1944. Even though it is acknowledged by the member of the Black Sheep Squadron that Boyington drank excessively, the fact remained that they found him to be an exceptional and natural pilot and would gladly fly with him any day. Henry Bourgeois recalled of Boyington that “when he was in a plane, he was something special;” however, trouble followed him wherever he went.³²³

The Flying Tiger and Black Sheep Squadron left a legacy of doing whatever it took to accomplish the mission. When asked what today’s leadership wanted to leave behind for future Flying Tigers, Col. Short said: “Take care of your people, and they will take care of the mission.”³²⁴ Likewise, Lt. Col. Bucklew added for future Black Sheep, “Fly aggressively but within the limitations of the aircraft’s capability and those of the pilot. Pappy was a risk taker, but when mistakes were made, they landed and learned from them. The hope was the next time they met the enemy that the Black Sheep would be the most prepared.”³²⁵ It is evident that the current leadership of both the Flying Tigers and the Black Sheep take their role in continuing

³²² *Wings Over China*, “Interview with David Lee “Tex” Hill,” Produced by Susan Yu, MaxMediaAsia, 1999.

³²³ “The Gathering of Black Sheep,” Produced by Jeff Kent, 2000, YouTube.

³²⁴ Colonel Jennifer Short (Wing Commander of the 23rd Wing, Moody Air Force Base), Interviewed by Delynn Burrell, January 20, 2019.

³²⁵ Lieutenant Colonel Keith Bucklew (Executive Officer VMA-214, Yuma, Arizona), Interviewed by Delynn Burrell, March 20, 2019.

both Chennault and Boyington's legacy seriously. The profound respect each has for those who paved the way for today's generation continues to inspire them to be the best leader to ensure that the legacy is not tarnished nor fades.

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