



# FLIGHT-WATCH



**VOLUME 137**

By: Alan Armstrong, Esq.

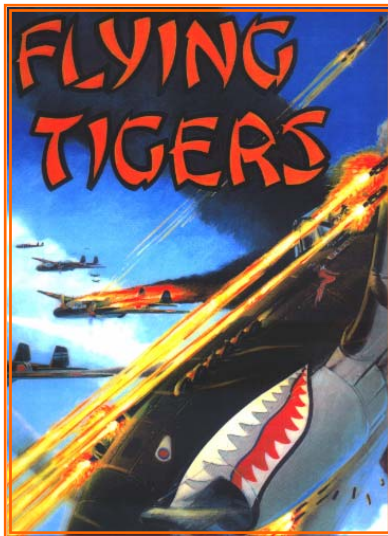
**OCTOBER 2003**

## RAISING THE TIGER -- PART 1

I.

### CHINA AND AMERICA – A COMMON HISTORICAL BOND

Dick Rossi, Jeff Greene, Yan Jiangzheng, and Tom Pandolfi are men of vision. They see beyond political ideologies that have separated China and America. Their vision draws upon a partnership between these two great nations that began with President Roosevelt's verbal order in early 1941 to Navy Secretary Frank Knox, to form a covert American air force in China. This air force would officially be an arm of the Chinese government, since America was not at war with Japan. Officially, this covert air force was known as "The First American Volunteer Group" ("First AVG"). There was to have been a Second American Volunteer Group, and the strength of this covert air force was to have grown to as many as 500 planes. Included in this force of 500 planes were to have been American bombers that would have been based at secret bases in Eastern China. These American bombers would have been engaged in firebombing key Japanese cities. If the plan had moved forward



Courtesy of Joel Naprstek

without delays, the firebombing of Japan would have taken place before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

The mastermind of this plan was Claire Chennault, a retired Army Air Corps pilot, who had been serving as a "technical advisor" to Generalissimo and Madame Chiang Kai-shek. Chennault had been in the employ of the Chinese Air Force since April of 1937. Chennault's passport said he was a "farmer." Had Chennault's bombing campaign of Japan been timely implemented, it is doubtful Japan could have succeeded with its surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, since it would have been occupied defending the Japanese home islands from bombing raids by American planes.



Fletcher Hanks, a former hump pilot, lays a wreath at the crash site of the C-53 flown by James R. Fox, Jr., in the summer of 1997. (Courtesy of SAAHF)



**President Jiang Zemin and the elder President Bush beside the bust of Hump Pilot James R. Fox, Jr., who died flying supplies to China. (Courtesy of SAAHF).**

In the dark days of World War II, when America had suffered defeats at Pearl Harbor, the Philippines, and Wake Island, the media (including Claire Boothe Luce, the wife of Henry Luce, a co-founder of Time Magazine) began reporting on the successes of Chennault's band of volunteers who were dubbed the "Flying Tigers." With the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Flying Tigers had less than 100 fighter planes to defend the "Burma Road," China's lifeline to the outside world. Chennault's hopes for an air force of 500 planes, including strategic bombers, were dashed. The opposing Japanese Army Air Force had no less than 1,500 planes which bore down heavily, attacking civilian and military installations in Burma and China. Although badly outnumbered,



**Dick Rossi and Jeff Greene standing by a roller used to flatten the airfield at Kweilin. (Courtesy of SAAHF).**

the Flying Tigers are officially credited with destroying 296 Japanese aircraft with the loss of four American pilots in air-to-air combat. This is the highest "kill ratio" of any American fighter group.

The AVG was officially disbanded on July 4, 1942, when its mission of defending China was assumed by the China Air Task Force ("CATF"). The CATF was under the command of Chennault as a brigadier general. Chennault never served permanent with a higher



**Dick Rossi, Erik Shilling, Bob Raine, Adm. Dick Macke (U.S.N., ret.), in China, September 6, 2001. (Courtesy of SAAHF)**

than captain, Chiang Kai-shek, China's leader, insisted that Chennault must command any air force operating in China. In April of 1942, Chennault was recalled to active duty in the Army Air Corps with the rank of brigadier general. Eventually, Chennault would be promoted to the rank of lieutenant general and given command of the 14<sup>th</sup> Air Force.

The Flying Tigers' key trademark, the glaring shark mouth motif on the nose of the P-40 fighter planes, was adopted by the CATF and



**Prof. Hua Bob Layher, Paul Clothier, E. Jane Petach Hanks, Dick Rossi, and Bob Raine standing before Hostel No. 1 in Kunming on the same day of the discussion about raising Blackburn's P-40 from Lake Dianchi. (Courtesy of SAAHF)**

the 14<sup>th</sup> Air Force. Subsequently, any American airman who served in China was called a "Flying Tiger." This has been a matter of some controversy between the AVG veterans and veterans of the CATF and/or the 14<sup>th</sup> Air Force.

Dick Rossi was an AVG pilot who resigned from the Navy to fly fighter planes in China. Between January 28, 1942 and June 12, 1942, Rossi destroyed six Japanese fighters in combat over China and Burma. When the AVG disbanded on July 4, 1942, Rossi became a pilot with the China National Aviation Corporation ("CNAC") and made a total of 750 flights over the hump while flying supplies from India to China.

Today, he is the President of the Flying Tigers Association, a veterans' association which perpetuates the memory of the AVG.



**Erik Shilling, Shui Junyi, Bob Raine, and Dick Rossi, the Flying Tigers who appeared on the TV program "China Focal Report" that was watched by 400 million viewers in China. (Courtesy of SAAHF)**

Tom Pandolfi has taken a keen interest in the history of the AVG. He has a substantial collection of AVG artifacts and memorabilia on display in the New England Museum of Aviation.



**Adm. Dick Macke (U.S.N., ret.), Jeff Greene, and Dick Rossi at a seminar conducted in China in honor of the achievements of the AVG. (Courtesy of SAAHF).**



Pandolfi was invited to China in October of 2002, to participate in a memorial ceremony and discuss the exploits of the AVG with scholars, researchers, and former military personnel from China, Thailand, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Pandolfi's invitation came from the Yunan Provincial Committee of the Peoples' Political Consultative Conference. Among other things, Pandolfi visited the headquarters and barracks of the AVG in the center of Kunming City, called Hostel No. 1. He also visited the Hump Pilots Memorial just outside Kunming. The other set of AVG barracks adjacent to Kunming Airport are scheduled for destruction.

The vision of these men also looks to the future in the context of a global economy. China is an emerging market that cannot be ignored by American industry. These men believe the way of the future involves increased cultural and economic relations between China and America.



Erik Shilling standing beside a P-40 replica at a museum in China. (Courtesy of SAAHF)



Erik Shilling and three veteran Chinese airmen during opening ceremonies of the Flying Tigers/WWII Commemorative Symposium at the Museum of the War of the Chinese Peoples' Resistance Against Japan in September, 2001. (Courtesy of SAAHF)

## II.

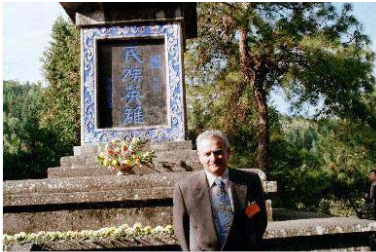
### OPERATION "SAVE THE TIGER"

On April 28, 1942, Flight Leader John Blackburn of Amarillo, Texas, was on a local flight near Kunming, China (headquarters of Chennault's

American Volunteer Group). Accompanying him was Flight Leader Robert J. Raine. Both pilots were flying Curtiss P-40 fighters and had been engaged in gunnery practice on a range near the shore of Lake Dianchi. They engaged in mock aerial combat, during which Raine lost sight of Blackburn. Only when Raine returned to Wu Chia Ba Airfield near Kunming, did he realize that Blackburn had not returned.

Fifty-five years later, on the shores of Lake Dianchi, eight veterans consisting of four Flying Tigers, Dick Rossi, Bob Raine, Bob Layher, and Paul Clothier; three veterans of the Chinese Army and Air Force, Professor Hua Renjie, Bvt. Major General, PLAAF (ret.), and a former CNAC hump pilot; Sr. Col. He, PLA (ret.); and Sr. Col. Wang, PLAAF; and Jeff Greene, a former Marine were discussing the crash of Blackburn's aircraft. Although Blackburn's body had been recovered shortly after the crash, his airplane remained buried in the waters of Lake Dianchi. At the time of this discussion, the gentlemen were standing at the Dragons' Gate Temple overlooking Lake Dianchi.

The conversation concluded with interest in raising Blackburn's P-40 from its watery grave.



**Tom Pandolfi in the Cemetery of Martyrs near Baoshan. (Courtesy of Tom Pandolfi)**

Two months later, Jeff Greene received a phone call from Professor Hua, who related that the China Association for Expedition (“CAE”) headed by Yan Jiangzheng was going to undertake the location and recovery of Blackburn’s aircraft. Green was requested to form a non-profit corporation in America to support the efforts of the CAE.

Yan Jiangzhen is a former Senior Colonel in the People’s Liberation Army, and he, together with other members of the CAE, was able to obtain permission from the Chinese government and military to recover the aircraft. Yan Jiangzhen has taken a role of leadership in this project. The CAE is composed of veterans of the People’s Liberation Army (“PLA”) and the People’s Liberation Army Air Force (“PLAAF”).

In the years since that phone conversation, there have been many activities shared by our countries. For example, in September, 2001,

three Flying Tigers, Dick Rossi, Erik Shilling, and Bob Raine, were guests in China during the opening ceremonies of the Flying Tigers/Second World War Commemorative Symposium at the Museum of the War of the Chinese Peoples’ Resistance Against Japan. Also, during the Symposium, the Flying Tiger Veterans participated in a one-hour television show moderated by Shui Junyie (China’s leading talk show host), the program being entitled “China Focal Report.” 400 million Chinese watched this television show, which paid tribute to the exploits and sacrifices of the Flying Tigers and the pilots who flew the hump during WWII. Two other American participants were Admiral Dick Macke, a retired four-star admiral who was the Commander of American Forces in the Pacific, and Jeff Greene, who formed the Sino-American Aviation Heritage Foundation (“SAAHF”). Nearly all of the members of the SAAHF are respected former military officers and enlisted men.

**John Blackburn. (Courtesy of SAAHF)**



Also, Yan Jiangzhen and the CAE arranged for Fletcher Hanks, a former CNAC hump pilot, to visit the crash site of a CNAC C-53 that crashed in 1943 with James R. Fox, Jr. at the controls. The elder President Bush and Chinese President Jiang Zemin paid tribute to Fox in October, 2002, at special ceremonies that were held in Washington, D.C., and at the George Bush Presidential Library in Texas.



Hump pilot with 'Blood Chit' patch on back of flight jacket in the company of Chinese soldiers. (Courtesy of SAAHF)

III.

A HISTORIC AND MEDIA EVENT

At the time this article is written, work is underway to raise Blackburn's P-40 from the depths of Lake Dianchi. It is anticipated that in the middle of November, the remains of the aircraft will be brought to the surface. AVG veterans Dick Rossi, Bob Layher, Bob Raine, and Peter Wright are anticipated to be in attendance. This event will be covered by China's CCTV Television Network and a film crew working for the Discovery Channel, which along with Starz Encore International, are the major sponsors of the recovery. The author of Flightwatch hopes to be in attendance among the people assembled on the shores of Lake Dianchi when John Blackburn's P-40 aircraft emerges from its watery cocoon.



Mr. Yan Jiangzhen, Executive Director of the China Assoc. for Expedition interviewing a witness to the crash of John Blackburn's P-40 fighter. (Courtesy of SAAHF)

D.C., Chinese Minister Zhao Qizheng of the Chinese State Council Information Office, stated:

"Mr. Greene of the Sino-American Aviation Heritage Foundation said in his letter, '...the story of the air war that raged across China during WWII is a monumental story of great courage and sacrifice. It is also a story of cooperation and trust, as American and Chinese airmen, Chinese soldiers, guerrilla fighters and civilians valiantly struggled to resist, and eventually vanquished, the military might of a fascist Imperial Japan. But more importantly, it is a story that dramatically demonstrates to the young people of both our countries the tremendous opportunity that exists for both the United States and China to actively cooperate and prosper in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.' I absolutely agree with you, Jeff!"

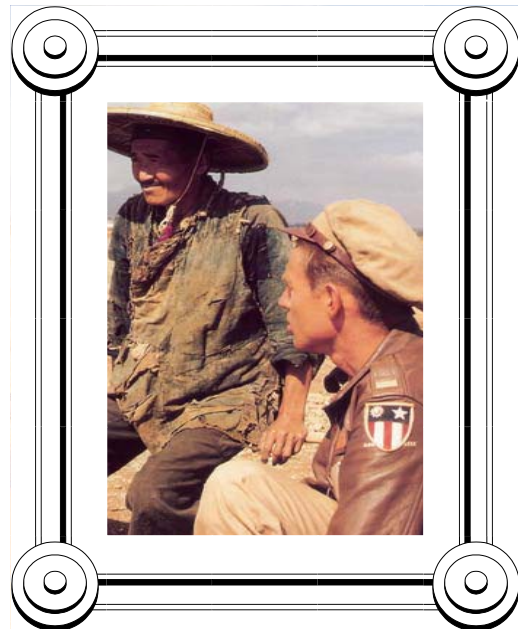
In October, 2002, in a speech given at the "Memory of History" photo exhibit in Washington,

Anyone having an interest in this expedition and the restoration of this Flying Tiger aircraft, is invited to contact Jeff Greene. Jeff's contact information is: email: [burmajeff@aol.com](mailto:burmajeff@aol.com); address: Sino-American Aviation Heritage Foundation, 1147 North Clark Street, Suite 204, West Hollywood, California, 90069; telephone: 310-659-5510; fax: 310-659-8472; website: [www.sinoam.com](http://www.sinoam.com). Anyone with an interest in the Flying Tiger's association may visit their website at [www.flyingtigersavg.com](http://www.flyingtigersavg.com). The collection of Tom Pandolfi's AVG artifacts may be viewed at the New England Air Museum, [www.neam.org](http://www.neam.org). Tom Pandolfi's email address is: [twig1027@aol.com](mailto:twig1027@aol.com).

Historical and creative material concerning Claire Chennault and the Flying Tigers can be viewed at [www.flyingtigersfilm.com](http://www.flyingtigersfilm.com).



**Six Flying Tigers, including John Blackburn are seen standing in front of one of their P-40 Tomahawk fighters in Rangoon, Burma in late February 1942. Seen in the photograph are Robert Neal, Robert Smith, William McGarry, Charles Bond, George Burgard., Blackburn is standing second on the right. (Courtesy of SAAHF)**



**U.S. Army Air Force "Hump" pilot Don Downie, is seen sharing a quiet moment with a Chinese airfield maintenance worker at Kunming in late 1944. (Courtesy of SAAHF)**



**The funeral of John Blackburn, Kunming, China. (Courtesy of SAAHF)**



**Alan Armstrong is engaged in the general practice of law with an emphasis in the following areas:**

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