

Allies in the Anti-Japanese War—WWII

The Chinese-American Composite Wing

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he Chinese-American Composite Wing (CACW) composed of two fighter groups and a bomber group, namely the 1st, the 3rd, and the 5th groups; hence the name Composite Wing. Each group was divided into four squadrons. It is generally accepted that the Composite Wing was established due to the recommendation of Major General Claire L. Chennault.

From 1941 to 1942, Chennault led the American Volunteer Group (AVG), popularly known as the Flying Tigers(Editor's Note), to fight the Japanese over Burma and China. In the summer of 1942, the AVG was dissolved and replaced by the China Air Task Force (CATF).

In July 1943, after the CATF was dispersed, Chennault took charge of the US 14th Air Force, which was formed in a rush due to the need of China-India-Burma Theater. In the beginning, manpower and materiel were both far short of its intended goal.

Reinforcement was slow to come and the war situation there forced Chennault to draft his fliers and other manpower from the China Air Force. The Composite Wing was thus formed in October 1943. The draftees received their short-term training in Karachi, India (now in Pakistan) and then flew their planes provided by the US back to Kunming❖, China.

From <http://www.chineseoralhistory.org/topic-en.html>

To expand drafting, the Chinese Government also launched a huge campaign to recruit college students for the air force. These new entrants were sent to America for training after a basic course in Yibin, China. They received instructions at Williams Field, Luke Field and Thunderbird Field near Phoenix, Arizona for almost a full year and returned to China after graduation to join the CACW. The CACW eventually became a major force in the air and won numerous battles against the Japanese.

The backbone of the Composite Wing consisted mainly of Chinese fliers. But a great number of American pilots were sent to China. They fought the Japanese wing to wing with their Chinese colleague. There were American and Chinese commanders at every commanding level of the CACW. The closely meshing of the US and Chinese fliers in this unique fighting force in the air also reflected the excellent cooperation between the two countries for the purpose of defeating the Axis.

The surviving members of the Composite Wing now live in Atlanta, Dallas, Houston, San Francisco, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Mainland China. The Society has interviewed George Ma, Roland Hsu, Kuang-fu Wang, Fred Chiao, Joseph Mao, Chen-hai Ku and Andy Fan in the US, Kung-chuan Hsia, Wei Yu, Hua-chiang Hsu, Sung-gin Wang in Taiwan as well as Qiyao Wu and Shouqi Shu (interpreter) in Mainland China. We intend to interview more fliers of the Composite Wing, particularly the American fliers. We also hope that these interviews would soon result in a book honoring these brave heroes.

US airmen in China obviously faced serious language problems. Gen. Chennault then requested Washington to recruit a group of Chinese American to support US armed forces in the China-Burma-India theater. Coincidentally the 5th Air Service Command at Patterson Field, Ohio was already formed at the initiative of Mr. Sing Yung Yee. This group of 20 ethnic Chinese was highly trained radio communication technicians.

By special arrangement of the War Department, they were then transferred to the 14th Air Service Group. The

Group was then greatly expanded. After a few months' training, the Air Service Squadron, Signal Company, Ordnance Company and other units were sent to China in January 1944. Upon their return in 1945, many of them went to college under the GI Bill. Others entered government service and turned a new page in the history of the Chinese immigrants in this country.

We have interviewed veterans of the Air Service Group in New York, Houston and San Francisco.

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Interview with Fred Chiao

Fred Chiao, a graduate of the China Air Force Academy (1940), was a member of the 5th Fighter Group.

Fred Chiao, 95, is one of the last surviving members of the Chinese-American Composite Wing. Here, he showcases a letter from Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou❖. Photo by Trevor Williams.



In October 2010, a luncheon premiere was arranged, and a group of 12 local Chinese packed into the Mambo Italian Restaurant on Peachtree Parkway, just around the corner from Mr. Chiao's two-story home.

As soon as he saw the film, the 94-year-old began to narrate.

"He starts naming dates and people and who he knew and where it was, and it became pretty extraordinary, just like seeing and speaking with the past," Mr. Judd said.



Atlantan Allen Judd's discovery of old World War II footage in his father's belongings led to a relationship with a 95-year-old Chinese war hero, shedding new light on Mr. Judd's family legacy and an often-overlooked piece of Chinese history.

In footage captured by Atlantan Allen Judd's father during World War II, a Japanese plane touches down in Chihkiang, China, bringing an envoy that would accept the terms of its government's surrender to the Chinese

What unfolded was more than a travelogue. Mr. Chiao was almost certain that the film contained unique shots of Japan's surrender to Chinese forces at Chihkiang airfield in China's Hunan province.

"When Raymond told us about the film, I knew that was exclusive footage. I never saw any photo or film outside the surrender," Mr. Chiao told Global Atlanta.

It was a poignant moment for the former fighter pilot, who is set to turn 96 on Nov. 5.

Mr. Chiao is one of the last remaining members of the Chinese-American Composite Wing, a special joint unit of Chinese and American fighter pilots launched under the command of American Maj. General Claire Lee Chennault in 1943.

Mr. Chennault headed to China in 1937 to reorganize the country's air forces after retiring from the U.S. Air Force. Through Soong May-ling, Chiang Kai-shek's wife and an English speaker by virtue of her studies at Wesleyan College in Macon, Ga., the two military men were able to communicate.

Mr. Chennault assembled his first unit in 1941. The American Volunteer Group included some 100 U.S. fighter pilots who scrambled to meet the Japanese threat. The first to engage the Japanese air force, even before Pearl Harbor, they were renowned for undertaking daring missions against superior numbers.



With planes painted with the grinning mouths of tiger sharks and a fearsome reputation for shooting down enemy aircraft, the unit became known as the Flying Tigers.

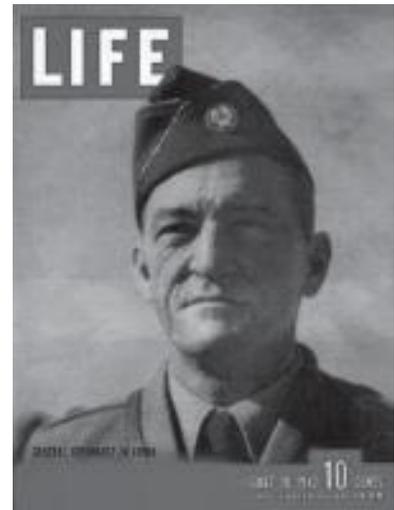
In 1943, the American Volunteer Group was subsumed into the 14th Air Force established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt under Mr. Chennault's command. Faced with scant resources, Mr. Chennault banded together with Mr. Chiang to create the Chinese-American Composite Wing.

Unlocking Memories

For Mr. Chiao and other families with connections to the war, Mr. Judd's video of the Japanese surrender provided a sense of closure.

"He waited 66 years to see that. He never saw it,

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although that was what he was fighting for," said David Chiao, Fred's son, who also lives in Atlanta.

The elder Mr. Chiao was recovering in an American hospital in India at the time of the ceremony on Aug. 23, 1945. His wing men escorted the Japanese plane as it came in to land.

Earlier that year, on Jan. 20, he was flying a mission over occupied territory in Hengyang, China, to disrupt Japan's overland supply lines. A Japanese fighter intercepted from above and peppered him with 7.7-millimeter bullets that penetrated his windshield and struck him in the face.

"They knocked out my left jaw," he said, noting that he still has shrapnel lodged there. "Lucky shot."

He tried to maneuver the plane back to base but eventually had to eject behind enemy lines. That's when the fight for survival really began. For hours he evaded Japanese dogs that chased the scent of his blood across the countryside.

But as he was drinking from a rice paddy, about to faint, Chinese resistance fighters knocked him out with a rifle butt, unsure of which side he was fighting for.

From then on, fate smiled on him.

"The old Lord really helped me," Mr. Chiao said with a chuckle.

The Japanese didn't give up their pursuit; as a fighter pilot, Mr. Chiao was a valuable intelligence asset. They chased him for 21 days, but Chinese soldiers valiantly protected him against Japanese incursions, some even losing their lives in the process, according to his son, David.

Finally, American intelligence agents arranged for him to be transferred to a hospital station 30 miles

away.

“They loaded me on the sedan [chair]. You know the morphine was helping me feel like a king,” he said.

To Taiwan and Today

Hearing these stories and meeting people like Mr. Chiao were unexpected but rewarding aspects of the video’s resurfacing, Mr. Judd said.

“What I’ve learned is that my dad’s film has been a key that unlocks lots of other information from people who either had no reason to bring it yet or they saw something and it triggered a memory, so it’s been really spectacular,” he said.

Its influence hasn’t been limited to Georgia’s borders. The video has made its way across the Pacific to Taiwan, reaffirming historic ties between the Republic of China (the island’s official name) and the United States even as the latter’s interests grow increasingly intertwined with the communist People’s Republic of China, which took over the mainland in 1949.

“It’s a very glorious history on both sides,” said Mike Tien, an air force major general in Taiwan and self-taught Flying Tigers historian. “Both sides, they sacrificed their lives to fight for freedom against the Japanese invasion, so I think that this is very important. We need to keep that and educate our younger generation, even to the whole world.”

Mr. Tien received Mr. Judd’s video soon after it was shown to Mr. Chiao. In 13 years of collecting books, films and memorabilia from the Flying Tigers, he had never seen anything like it, he told Global Atlanta during an interview in Taipei last year.

“Almost crying,” was his initial reaction. “I was very impressed. That’s a very historic film.”

Mr. Tien sent a copy to Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou, who ordered it placed in the national archives before sending letters of appreciation to Mr. Chiao and Mr. Judd, who became the second in his family to receive a letter from a sitting president of the Chinese republic.

Permanent Displays

Perhaps more thrilling for Mr. Judd is that the video is on display in the Flying Tigers exhibition at the Republic of China Air Force Museum in Kaohsiung, a city in southern Taiwan.

The large room with blue walls boasts sections with



The Republic of China Air Force Museum in Kaohsiung.

photos, paintings, medals, letters and myriad other items. It’s an appropriate place to enshrine what Mr. Judd sees as a gift to Chinese and Japanese families who lost loved ones in the war.

Even more fitting: a few stalls away from the video, behind a glass case, is the blood-stained green jumpsuit Mr.

Chiao wore when he was shot down, an integral part of the story that brought two men together across generations in a city half a world away.

Back at Mr. Chiao’s home, the second floor is like a museum of its own. His upstairs den overflows with books, airplane models, paintings and photos depicting his post-war stations. He’s particularly proud of one where he stands beside Chiang Kai-Shek and King Hussein of Jordan during the monarch’s visit to Taiwan. King Hussein, also a pilot, had selected Mr. Chiao as his personal attache.

Though the artifacts may seem obscure to some, they weave a picture of an often-overlooked period of U.S.-China collaboration with only a few witnesses left.

In 2010, Mr. Chiao headed back to Chihkiang, now called Zhijiang in mainland China’s Hunan province, to inaugurate a monument to Mr. Chennault and the Flying Tigers at the site of the old air base of the Chinese-American Composite Wing.

Another Georgian - President Jimmy Carter - also made the trip. Mr. Carter, a former U.S. Navy sailor who was stationed off the China coast in the 1940s, normalized relations between mainland China and the United States in 1979.

Mr. Chiao grabbed a handful of dirt from the site to commemorate his fallen brothers in arms, said David Chiao, who accompanied his father on the trip.

“If the old Lord gives me a little longer time, I’ll still last to tell those stories,” Mr. Chiao said.

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Editor’s Note:

Reports indicate that John Woo, a Chinese American film director of distinction, may be working on another World War II film, this time about the American Volunteer Group, or the Flying Tigers. He has stated that Flying Tiger Heroes would be an “extremely important production” and will “emphasize US-Chinese friendship and the contributions of the Flying Tigers and the Yunnan people during the war of resistance against Japan.”

