

## General Claire L. Chennault Memorial Post 9555



## "Post 9555 History"

*Chartered: 30 October 1952*

*Original Location: Nagoya*

*New Location: Yokota, Japan following consolidation.*

*Consolidation: Carl H. Manson Post 9794, Tachikawa with General Claire L. Chennault Post 9555, 30 October 1952. From consolidations General Claire L. Chennault Post 9876 and Sheldon P. Stein Post 9555 on 28 September 1973; and further consolidation of Manson Post 9794 with General Claire L. Chennault Post 9555 on 28 February 1977.*

### History behind the Post Name

General Claire L. Chennault Post 9555 (Yokota, Japan; chartered 10/30/52)

Flying Tiger Post 9957 (Taipei, Taiwan; chartered 4/11/64)

The history behind the Post names of General Claire L. Chennault Post 9555 in Yokota, Japan, and Flying Tiger Post 9957 in Taipei, Taiwan, cannot be separated. How can one discuss Chennault without mentioning the Flying Tigers, or discuss the Flying Tigers without mentioning Chennault?

Naturally, a short article like this cannot cover the history of Chennault and the Flying Tigers. But maybe it will make some readers interested enough to look for further information in books or on the Internet.

Claire L. Chennault (1893-1958) was one of the most argumentative and controversial military men of the 1930s and 1940s. Hailing from Waterproof, Louisiana, he joined the Army Air Corps during the First World War. When he arrived at the Air Corps Tactical School in 1930 he already had a reputation as a premier pursuit pilot, and he developed his ideas on pursuit employment from much thought and practical experience. Unfortunately, the Air Corps was making a decisive shift toward bombardment, and Chennault's attempts to influence that thinking were futile. As well, his abrasive personality negated his arguments.

Even in the mid-1930s Chennault seemed a generation older, his face seamed and his hearing dimmed from years of flying open-cockpit planes. As well, his lungs were wracked by bronchitis, the penalty for a two-pack-a-day addiction to Camel cigarettes. The Army forced him to retire in 1937, supposedly for health reasons but more likely because his theories of using fighters to attack bombers were out of tune with Air Corps policy.

Soon after, Chennault moved to China, where he served as an adviser to Chiang Kai Shek. That's where he formed the American Volunteer Group (AVG) of fighter pilots. Heading the AVG to fight an air battle against the Japanese was well suited to Chennault's aggressive and unconventional personality. Other descriptions of Chennault include the words gruff, stubborn, iconoclastic, flamboyant, abrasive, but gentle and cultured.

Chennault never rose above major in the Air Corps but in China he called himself "colonel." He developed the theory of "defensive pursuit," attacking enemy bombers before they reached their destination. He quickly proved the theory reliable as his Chinese pilots cut a murderous swatch through unescorted enemy bomber squadrons. He also called upon a small cadre of American pilots who knew him from service in the U.S. Army Air Corps, including the famous Luke Williamson and Billy McDonald, Chennault's wingmen in the Flying Trapeze, a precision flying team that prefigured today's Thunderbirds.

To reduce their losses from the AVG, the Japanese brought in Mitsubishi A5Ms, open-cockpit monoplanes with fixed landing gear and two rifle-calibre machineguns. The A5Ms were faster and more agile than the U.S.-built biplanes the Chinese pilots were flying, leading to a dark period for the AVG. Finally, in 1940, Chiang Kai Shek sent his wife's brother on a mission to Washington to request U.S. aid; Chennault accompanied him as air adviser. The visit resulted in the U.S. giving Chiang "100 good pursuit planes," Curtiss P-40Cs (Tomahawks). In addition, 100 "fair pilots" were recruited from the U.S. armed services. Two hundred technicians were also needed. It was November 1941, however, before the last contingent reached Burma. In the first week of December 1941, Chennault counted 62 Tomahawks on the flight line, with about the same number of pilots qualified to fly them.

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, they also attacked British and Dutch possessions in Southeast Asia. With no reinforcements in sight, Chennault's three under strength; half-trained squadrons in Burma had to defend the entire 2,000-mile "Burma Road," from Rangoon to Chongqing. Chennault relocated his planes to Kunming in the

highlands, and it was near there that the AVG was blooded on December 20, 1941. They attacked 10 unescorted twin-engine Japanese bombers sent north from Hanoi, shooting down three or four at the cost of one Tomahawk that crash-landed after running out of fuel. This was when the AVG earned the name the “Flying Tigers.” Persons in China’s military aid office in Washington, D.C., coined the name, and its first wide public use was in the December 27, 1941, issue of Time magazine, in a report on the above air battle. That, incidentally, was the first Allied victory of the Pacific War.

In the next six months of combat, Chennault’s irregulars were credited with destroying 296 Japanese planes and 1,000 airmen, at a cost of 16 Americans killed or captured in combat operations. The fights with the Flying Tigers marked the first time Japanese pilots came out second best. The psychological value of the Flying Tigers’ record was incalculable as the U.S. and its Allies geared up to drive the Japanese back to their homeland.

The AFG was incorporated into the U.S. Army’s 14<sup>th</sup> Air Force in July 1942, and Chennault was made a brigadier general. Although he was eventually promoted to major general, he continued to battle his own superiors. George Marshall called him “disloyal and unreliable” because Chennault liked to go directly to Chiang Kai Shek and Roosevelt; Hap Arnold considered him a “crackpot”; and Joe Stilwell (his superior in China) called him “a jackass.” He retired in 1945. His later years after founding the Chinese Air Transport Company are a separate story.

Some say the only true Flying Tigers were the irregulars who flew with Chennault until July 1942. But the pilots of the 14<sup>th</sup> suffered a logistical poverty as great as the AVG and like the original Flying Tigers they outfought the Japanese air units almost every time they met. The American press thus continued to call them Flying Tigers.

Chennault left China on August 1, 1945. Hundreds of thousands of Chinese filled the streets of Chongqing, inspiring Chennault’s driver to turn off the ignition, put the shift in neutral, and let the throng push the car all the way to the airport. As if to symbolize his dual loyalty to the U.S. and China, Chennault’s grave is the only one in Arlington National Cemetery to bear a Chinese inscription, and the bust of him in the Taipei New Park is the only statue of a Westerner to grace that city. Post 9957 has always conducted its Memorial Services before that statue.

Two VFW Posts – Post 9555 in Yokota, Japan, and Post 9957 in Taipei, Taiwan -- tied across thousands of miles of water through closely related names. On February 7, 2012 the Tokyo Post 9450 officially merged with Post 9555.

Compiled by Past Department and District II Commander Tom Elliott

### **Post Commanders**

Hank Gilbert*	1992-1994
Michael J. Wagner	1994-1995
Earl W. Hanson*	1995-1996
Timothy W. Williams	1996-2001
Charles D. Meador	2001-2002
Christopher J. Vaughn	2002-2003
Demetrius Harvin	2003-2004
Anthony F. Byrd	2004-2005
Kevin E. Mitchell	2005-2008
Robert W. Moses	2008-

### **District II Commanders**

Kevin E. Mitchell	2005-2007
Robert W. Moses	2011-2012

### **Grand Commanders of Pacific**

Everett T. Tompkins*	1993-1994
Kevin E. Mitchell	2012-2013

\*Deceased

### **Some Post 9555 activities:**



**Yokota hosts Memorial Day services**

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan -- Robert Moses of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 9555 salutes the American flag May 25 during the post's Memorial Day ceremony near Nina Circle. Gen. John A. Logan, commander of the Grand Army of the Republic , officially proclaimed Memorial Day on May 5, 1868. The holiday was first observed on May 30, 1868, when flowers were placed on the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery.



Post 9555 members and guest after Fishing Outing at Ongata Ponds, Hachioji, Japan July 2006



Post 9450 (now Post 9555) Frank Hunter prepares to perform on Bagpipes during Repatriation Ceremony co-sponsored by Post 9555 at Yokota Air Base, Japan on October 29, 2002.



Post 9555 and District II comrades salute during Repatriation Ceremony at Yokota Air Base, Japan October 29, 2002.



Comrade Kevin Mitchell gives the eulogy at PGC and Post Quartermaster Thomas T. Tompkins Memorial Service October 19, 2002 at General Claire L. Chennault Post 9555, Yokota Air Base, Japan.



Past Post Commander Timothy W. Williams lays a Buddy Poppy wreath in honor of Comrade/PGC Tompkins service to the VFW/MOC and our country.



Post Commander Christopher Vaughn presents the US Flag to Comrade Tompkins widow Harue.



Comrade Everett T. Tompkins served Post 9555 and the Fussa community for 31 years. Was Grand Commander of the Pacific from 1993-94.



Kevin Mitchell served as Grand Commander of the Pacific 2012-13





Post 9555 has sponsored Cub Scout Pack 49 for almost 60 years. Comrade Mike Brezell is in a long line of members who serve as Cub Mentor.



Current longest serving active member of Post 9555 Comrade Humphrey "Gil" Gaunce a Past Post Commander of 9450 Tokyo, hands out Buddy Poppies at the New Sanno Hotel, Tokyo, January 2013