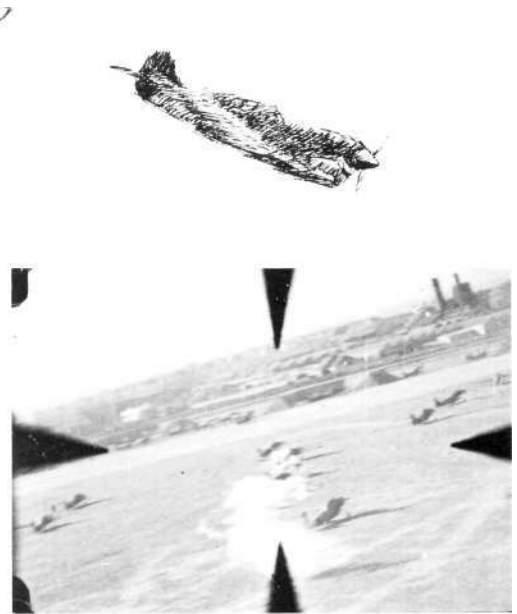
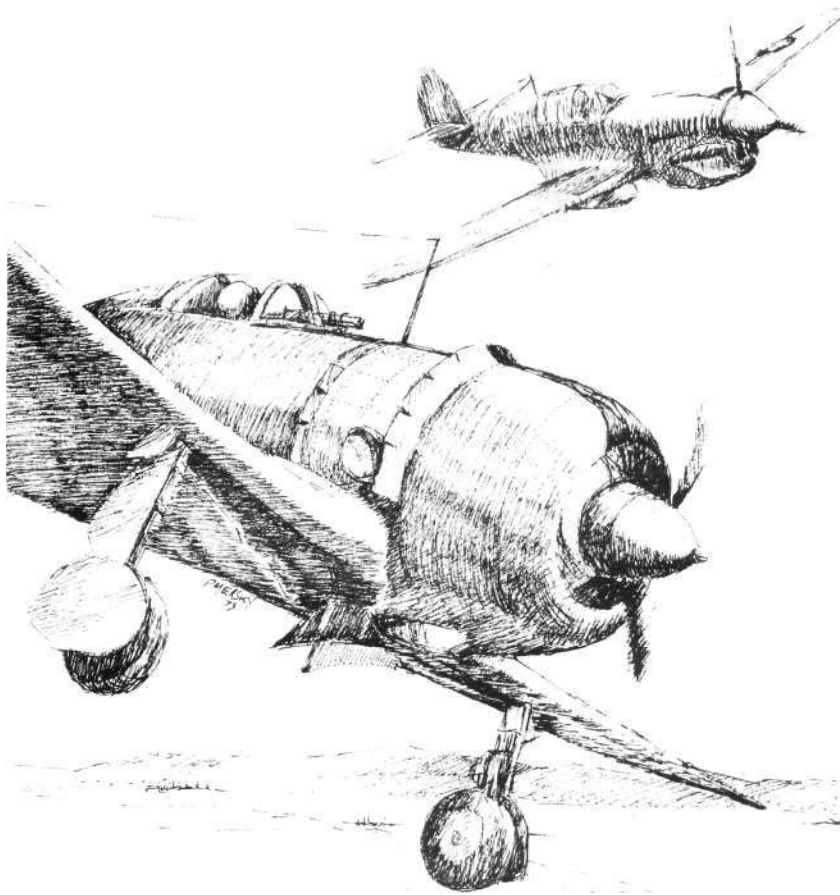




CACW

An American Ace in the
Chinese-American Composite Wing
By HUGH STEPHENS MOSELEY, M.D.

When asked what American fighter pilot destroyed the most enemy aircraft during World War II, the answer invariably is given — Richard I. Bong. That is not entirely true. One American fighter pilot is officially credited with the destruction of 41.5 enemy aircraft. The man is Thomas Allison Reynolds, Jr. whose corrected score stands at 38.5 destroyed on the ground and 3 in the air.¹ His story is not only that of an individual but also of a little known unit, the Chinese-American Composite Wing.

Thomas A. Reynolds originally came from Camden, Arkansas and grew up in the oil boom town of Stephens, Arkansas. After attending Arkansas A & M College, he enlisted as an aviation cadet at Tulsa University in May 1941 at the age of twenty three. His basic training ended only four days after Pearl Harbor, but much to his disappointment he was assigned to the Training Command. He spent the next two years with the 312th Fighter Squadron, 338th Fighter Group at Tallahassee, Dale Mabry, and Perry, Florida, as an instructor. Until he received orders in December 1943 to proceed to India, he had accumulated over 900 hours of flying time.

The Fourteenth Air Force was officially constituted on 5 March 1943. However, the China Air Task Force was not officially assigned to the 14th Air Force until 24 April 1943.² Many publications list the 14th Air Force as composed only of the 68th and 69th Composite Wings, but in October 1943 a third wing, the Chinese-American Composite Wing, was created." The CACW Units received their numerical designations from the Chinese Air Force, and were assigned to the 68th Composite Wing for operations.³

Chinese pilots assigned to the CACW were regular Chinese Air Force pilots who had been trained by the Americans. Primary training was done at Williams and Luke Fields while advanced training was at Karachi, India. Chennault's plan was that Chinese



Gun camera film from Mahor Reynolds' P-51C confirmed the shoot-up of Japanese-held Hankow Air-drome, January 1945. The main mission of the Chinese-American Composite Wing was the destruction of support for the Japanese offensive.

pilots would be trained and led by American pilots and as soon as proficiency was obtained, they would operate as a unit, independent of American supervision, and integrated with the Chinese Air Force. For primarily political reasons, this goal was never realized.

During the three-month interval Capt. Reynolds was enroute to India via ship, the military situation in China was changing drastically. With sea lanes being threatened by United States naval power, Japan realized that overland routes would have to be obtained to keep supply lines open to Southeast Asia. Under the protection of winter the Japanese began a large troop buildup totaling some 620,000 men in the bend of the Old Yellow River, Hangchow, Canton, the Luichow Peninsula, and northern Indo-China. The plan was to launch an offensive from the Yellow River south towards Changsha, from Canton to the Lung-hai Railroad at Liuchow, and north along the railroad from Indo-China.

The Japanese goals of "Operation Schi-go" were to: 1) secure the north-south transcontinental railroad network from Peiking to Hanoi; 2) forestall the bombing of the Japanese homeland by China based B-29's; 3) eliminate the 14th Air Force in eastern China from which anti-shipping strikes could be made; 4) secure the Kweilin-Liuchow area in anticipation of a future counter offensive from India, and 5) crush the backbone of the Chinese Army.

This action would entrap the 68th Composite Wing, operating to the east of the 108th meridian, in a vice. Chennault predicted the campaign would begin about 1 May 1944 but for once the Japanese fooled him by launching the offensive on 19 April 1944. CACW squadrons were in the process of being transferred to CAF bases and the initial opportunity to strike was lost.

Capt. Reynolds arrived at Karachi on April 2nd where he became

Army Air Forces in China in 1944

were divided in area of operation, the

69th Composite Wing working East of the 108th

Meridian, 68th to the West, including the CACW.

an advanced fighter instructor to the Chinese. One month later he was assigned as a Flight Leader to the 17th Fighter Squadron, 5th Fighter Group of the CACW based at Chihkiang, then flying the Curtiss P-40N.

His first mission, June 12th, was an uneventful strafing run north of Changsha and his first contact with enemy fighters occurred on 18 June, the day Changsha fell.⁵ Four B-25's of the 3rd and 4th Bombardment Squadrons, CACW, were bounced by eight "Oscar II's." The four P-40N's flying with the bombers immediately turned into the attack, and one P-40 was quickly shot down. Lt. Col. John A. Dunning's four plane flight, flying top cover at 6500 feet, saw the milling dog fight 2000 feet below, and as they dove into the attack, Col. Dunning damaged an Oscar with an 80 degree deflection shot. Both planes pulled around and made a head-on firing pass at each other and again, turning sharply, passed to head-on. On the third head-on pass two Oscars got on Dunning's tail forcing him to power dive to the deck. The fight ended four to one in favor of the 17th. Capt. Reynolds failed to get any hits, but he emerged from his first combat unscathed.

On 26 June, ten miles south of Changsha, Reynolds was leading a three plane flight as top cover when bounced by eleven Oscars led by a single "Tony." This was the first Ki. 61 seen by the group. The P-40's turned into the attack but each was soon surrounded. Reynolds half-rolled and immediately felt a shudder as he headed

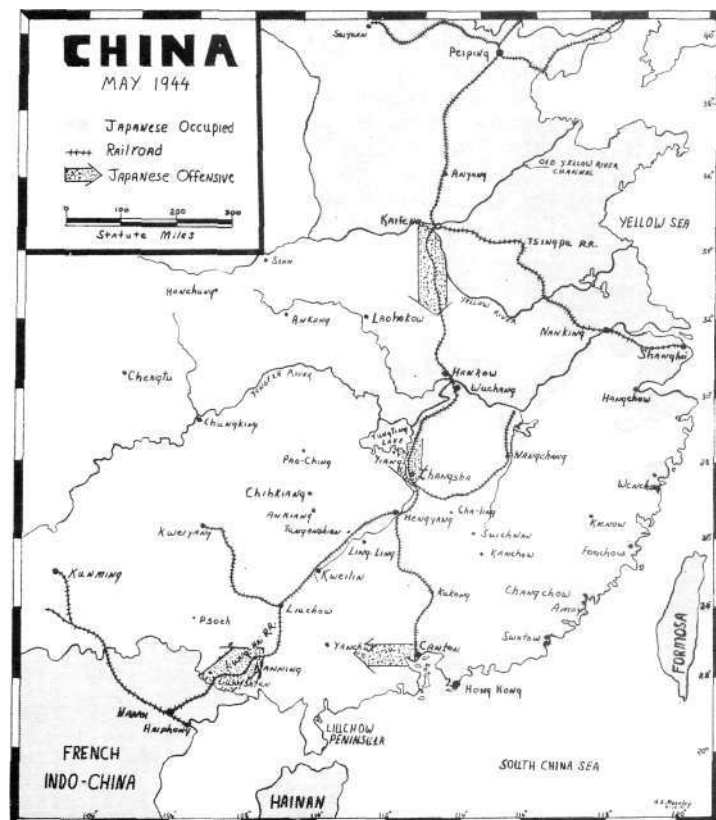
for the deck and with added speed he pulled away from the Ki.43 and zoomed back into the melee at 4000 feet. An Oscar pulled away from the fight and began climbing; observing him, Reynolds followed and fired, his tracers suddenly blanketing the enemy airplane. It made one turn and spun into the ground.

By this time another Oscar was firing at Reynolds, and once again he headed for the deck. His wingman, Capt. G.W. Ramsey, closed to 300 yards and fired. The Oscar broke off, turning suddenly under him, and Ramsey continued down with two Ki.43's now to contend with himself. Unable to shake his attackers, Ramsey dove through an element of P-40's strafing below. Lt. W.K. Bonneaux in the strafing flight, saw Ramsey flash through the formation and fired a deflection shot at one Ki.43 which began to smoke and broke off. The combat broke off soon afterward, both sides retiring.

The majority of CACW missions during the remainder of June and July flown by the 5th Ftr. Gp. were against transportation movements in the Tungting Lake area and in support of the retreating Chinese Army. The Japanese offensive could not be stopped despite a heroic defense by the poorly equipped Chinese Army. On 8 August Hengyang was taken and Kweilin fell on 10 November, opening the railroad from Haiphong to Shanghai and Peiping.

A near disaster occurred on 8 July. A group of P-51's bounced the 17th Ftr. Sq. pulling up from a ground attack. Sub. Lt. F.K. Pu caught the brunt of the fire before the mistake was recognized, but fortunately was not hit.

Even though the 5th Ftr. Gp. had few aerial encounters in late summer, relationships between the CACW and CAF grew tense. The CAF was under orders not to engage enemy aircraft. Though operating with the CACW, when Japanese fighters were sighted the CAF often headed for home. For unknown reasons the





Japanese Army Air Force never made a bid for aerial supremacy even though estimated by Allied intelligence to have a considerable force of 400 fighters and 150 bombers. It was speculated that the better pilots were being transferred from China to the Pacific.

Life at Chihkiang, the 17th Ftr. Sq. base, was hazardous at best. Snipers were common in the area, making venture off the base risky. Facilities were poor and gasoline stores were often critical. Food, for which the CACW was dependent upon the Chinese, was rather scarce; meat was practically unobtainable and the only abundant substance besides rice was eggs. Surprisingly, most of the pilots remained healthy except for occasional bouts of diarrhea. Reynolds described the situation as much like being in prison. Except for air raids, the only excitement was flying.

Reynolds had been getting plenty of flying - in the period up to now with the 17th Ftr. Sq. he had piled up over fifty missions as flight leader, and in October he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross with Oak Leaf Cluster, for his extraordinary leadership.

On 11 November 1944 the 75th Ftr. Sq. also based at Chihkiang, reported a large number of aircraft over Hengyang, where they had staged a raid. Reynolds quickly planned a raid on the Hengyang airfield involving all three squadrons of the 5th Ftr. Gp. then at Chihkiang, the 17th, 26th, and 29th. As the combined group approached the enemy field, flying at 10,000 feet, they counted over fifteen fighters in the air and estimated another forty scattered singly around the field. Clearly, it represented the largest collection of Japanese aircraft based in the heart of China.

Reynolds leveled out over the field with his three plane flight at just over 400 mph, approaching from north to south. Notwithstanding the earlier raid by the 75th, the Japanese were caught by surprise. Reynolds directed his fire at two Ki.43's on the southeast corner of the field and planted his parafragmentation bombs in a revetment. Turning for a second pass, he saw the two fighters in flames. A quick burst exploded an Oscar trying to take off in front of him. By this time anti-aircraft fire was becoming intense. On his fourth pass he hit another Ki.43 which flashed fire and exploded while taxiing. He then led his flight up while Lt. John Miller brought the top cover down.

Several minutes later, Reynolds was bounced at 8,000 feet by an unseen Oscar which shot up his horizontal stabilizer. Lt. Miller, finishing his sixth strafing run, saw Reynolds diving like a bat out of hell and in trouble, and he fired a 45 degree deflection shot causing the Ki.43 to break. He then rolled onto the Oscar's tail, firing from 300 yards. The plane flipped on its back and headed earthward trailing thick black smoke; unfortunately it was not seen to crash.



The claims for the Group were: eighteen aircraft destroyed, thirteen damaged, and one probable. Lt. Wang was the only pilot injured and he bled in at Chihkiang. Reynolds' P-40, 44-7402, was so badly damaged it was scrapped. For gallantry and leadership on this mission, Capt. Reynolds was awarded the Silver Star.

In December Reynolds was promoted to Major and sent to Laohokow, much further north, to command the 7th Ftr. Sq. of the 5th Ftr. Gp. Also operating from Laohokow were the 8th, 16th, 25th, 26th, and 32nd Fighter Squadrons from other Groups. The winter in China was rather bleak except for one nice gift: CACW squadrons were beginning to receive P-51's to replace P-40N's as they were lost. It was rare for any CACW aircraft to get over 100 hours before it had to be replaced or was lost. Consequently, by the end of February, the 7th Ftr. Sq. was completely converted to "Mustangs."

Repair facilities at both Chihkiang and Laohokow were very poor. Laohokow's ground transportation consisted of two jeeps and one 6 X 6 truck. On one occasion a Chengtu-based B-29 made an emergency belly landing at Laohokow stopping in the middle of the field which completely disrupted operations. The problem was what to do with the stricken craft since facilities and equipment were inadequate to either repair or move it. It was finally blown up and the pieces dragged to the edge of the field with the one available truck. However, the truck had insufficient power to drag the heavy Wright R-3350 engines, and to solve this problem, Chinese coolies simply dug holes in the runway and buried them.

Throughout January and early February the CACW made daily raids on the Hankow — Wuchang area. On 5 January, with a 10,000 foot ceiling and five mile visibility, Maj. Reynolds led his Squadron of two P-51's and six P-40's on a joint mission with the 28th, 16th, 32nd, and 8th Ftr. Sqs. to Hanchow. Reynolds led the first flight over the airfield from the north while Capt. Frank D. Klump led a second flight in from the south just as the first flight finished its first pass. As Reynolds and his pilots came roaring in, intense antiaircraft fire rose to greet them. Nevertheless, Reynolds dropped his bombs on the alert shack and headed over to shoot up the Wuchang air field. He burned one Ki.43 and headed back to Hangchow. On the next three passes he destroyed two Lillies and two Oscars.

In the meantime Lt. Heyward A. Paxton, Jr. and his top cover men had their hands full trying to fight off approximately thirty Ki.43's and Ki.44's. Paxton shot down a Tojo and damaged another. Though outnumbered, the top cover kept the enemy tied up until the strafers finished their work. Fourteen aircraft were claimed as destroyed and thirteen damaged by the Group but the mission was not without loss. Lt. Chen of the 8th Ftr. Sq. failed to pull out of a bomb run; Lt. S. Wang of the 32nd was seen leaving the dog fight trailing smoke; and Lt. Charles Perelka of the 7th was forced to bail out for unknown reasons, losing a new Mustang.

The 7th was running up an impressive tally of aircraft destroyed on the ground, which were recognized as legitimate claims in the 14th Air Force. For credit, the enemy aircraft had to be seen burning or exploding. Most claims were substantiated by eyewitness accounts since gun camera film was a luxury and was practically unavailable until early 1945.

According to Maj. Reynolds the CACW carried no special markings. When he flew with the 17th Ftr. Sq., the P-40N's carried Chinese insignia and were painted in standard U.S. Army Air Force olive drab upper surfaces and neutral gray undersurfaces. Replacement aircraft were often from other units and continued to carry those unit markings. Occasionally, the insignia were changed, but not always. A few P-51's had "Shark's teeth" on their noses and carried personal names, but most were unpainted natural aluminum. Very few CACW pilots painted

personal or victory markings on the aircraft. Reynolds held the Chinese pilots in high esteem. In general they flew and fought well. He personally felt that they were better trained when they went into combat than many of the American replacements.⁶

Maj. Reynolds obtained his second aerial victory as he swung behind a "Tojo" in the landing pattern at Tsichiao Chan on January 21st, 1945. The Tojo crashed into the woods at the edge of the field. February 10th was a good day also for the 7th. The mission was to strafe and bomb three airfields in the Shangtung area. Lt. James T. Moore of Plant City, Florida was the outstanding pilot of the day; he left twenty aircraft and one gas truck burning on the fields. Reynolds claimed ten "Kates" destroyed (although so-listed in his combat report, but may have been "Anns").

Reynold's final aerial victories came on 7 March 1945, following a bombing run on Nanking Harbor. As the 7th's P-51's climbed into the sun, they noticed enemy aircraft at 10,000 feet. Turning towards the city they dove on the twelve to fifteen Oscars and Tojos and the fight turned into a twisting, turning melee directly over Nanking. Reynolds got three 90-degree deflection shots, all at Tojos.

One started smoking badly and went down in a spin from 9,000 feet and Reynolds could only claim it as damaged. He gunned his Mustang, pulled away from a Tojo and headed back for Nanking, where he saw two Tojos coming straight at him about a thousand feet below. Reynolds pulled a tight, diving turn, coming in behind both fighters. Two short bursts later, both Ki.44's exploded. Reynolds was now low on gas and called the Squadron together and headed home.

It is to the credit of CACW squadrons operating from Laohokow that their continual pressure on Japanese air fields and supply lines led the Japanese to launch an offensive in March 1945 towards Laohokow. Advancing mainly by night, the Japanese moved steadily west. For several days the CACW was all over them, but on March 25th all buildings at Laohokow were burned and the personnel were evacuated as the enemy ground forces moved close. The 7th moved west to Ankang, but Laohokow was the last airfield the 14th Air Force yielded to the Japanese.

Maj. Reynolds' last mission is believed to have been flown on April Fools Day 1945. The 7th encountered a lone "Oscar" doing aerobatics over Nanking. As the 7th prepared to attack, Reynolds spotted seventeen Oscars and Tojos at 17,000 feet. Reynolds aptly said, "It was the old suck game, but Maj. Reynolds' flight didn't suck."⁷

Robert L. Scott wrote that "With only 393 officers and men in his CACW, Chennault destroyed 14,740 invading Japanese troops, 46 aircraft, more than 900 river boats, 817 automobiles and trucks, 32 bridges, and 26 storage dumps."⁸ The source of Col. Scott's statistics is not given, but as far as aircraft destroyed are concerned, Maj. Reynolds and Lt. James Moore together accounted for sixty.

When he left China in May 1945, Maj. Thomas A. Reynolds had flown 92 missions and 269 combat hours. He claimed four aircraft destroyed in the air, one probably destroyed in the air, thirty-seven destroyed on the ground, twenty-nine damaged, and one 330 foot railroad ferry boat sunk. There are discrepancies between Maj. Reynold's claims and the official victory list, and the one air-to-air victory which was disallowed has not been determined. The official list allows three air-to-air and 38.5 air-to-ground victories. Even so, his part in the action over China was important in keeping the enemy in check with a very meager force, the Chinese American Composite Wing. Today Thomas A. Reynolds lives in El Dorado, Arkansas, where he is an executive with the Georgia-Pacific Company.



Capt. Reynolds with unidentified officers of the 7th Fighter Sqdn. The P-51 has the usual radio direction finder loop typical of CBI airplanes.

COMBAT CLAIMS - May Reynolds

Date	Ground		Air	
	Destroyed	Damaged	Destroyed	Probables
7-26-44			1	
11-11-44	4	3		
12-20-44	7			
1-5-45	5	2		
1-6-45	4	1		
1-14-45	3	1		
1-16-45		1		
1-21-45	2		1	
1-27-45	1/2			
2-10-45	10	15		
2-20-45	3		2	1
3-7-45			2	1
4-1-45	2			

ABBREVIATIONS USED

CAF	Chinese Air Force
CACW	Chinese-American Composite Wing
Ftr. Sq.	Fighter Squadron
Ftr. Gp.	Fighter Group
Oscar	Nakajima Ki. 43 "Hayabusa"
Tojo	Nakajima Ki. 44 "Shoki"
Lilly	Nakajima Ki. 48 Type 99 Bomber
Ann	Mitsubishi Ki. 30
Tony	Kawasaki Ki. 61 "Hien"

Below, the Japanese bombing destroyed some CACW airplanes on the ground also. This one was of the 17th Ftr. Sq. Summer 1944.



ORGANIZATION OF THE 14th AIR FORCE 1944-1945⁹

68th Composite Wing — Operated east of 108th meridian. Detachments operated from Laohokow, Jan. — March 1945.

- 23rd Fighter Group
 - 74th Fighter Squadron
 - 75th Fighter Squadron
 - 76th Fighter Squadron
 - 118th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron

69th Composite Wing — Operated west of 108th meridian and in Indo China.

- 51st Fighter Group
 - 16th Fighter Squadron
 - 25th Fighter Squadron
 - 26th Fighter Squadron (Note 1)
 - 449th Fighter Squadron
- 341st Bomb Group (M)
 - 11th Bomb Squadron
 - 22nd Bomb Squadron
 - 491st Bomb Squadron

Chinese American Composite Wing — Assigned to 68th Wing for operations. Units were detached from Chinese Air Force units.

- 3rd Fighter Group
 - 8th Fighter Squadron
 - 28th Fighter Squadron
 - 32nd Fighter Squadron
- 5th Fighter Group
 - 7th Fighter Squadron
 - 17th Fighter Squadron
 - 26th Fighter Squadron (Note 1)
 - 29th Fighter Squadron
- 1st Bomb Group (M)
 - 1st Bomb Squadron
 - 2nd Bomb Squadron
 - 3rd Bomb Squadron
 - 4th Bomb Squadron

312th Fighter Wing - See Note 2.

- 311th Fighter Group.
 - 528th Fighter Squadron
 - 529th Fighter Squadron
 - 530th Fighter Squadron
- 81st Fighter Group
 - 91st Fighter Squadron
 - 92nd Fighter Squadron
 - 93rd Fighter Squadron
- 308th Bomb Group (H)
 - 373rd Bomb Squadron
 - 394th Bomb Squadron
 - 375th Bomb Squadron
 - 425th Bomb Squadron

490th Bomb Squadron (M) - Temporarily assigned to 312th Wing in 1945.

NOTE 1 — Apparently two 26th Fighter Squadrons. That attached to the Chinese American Composite Wing was named from Chinese Air Force.

NOTE 2 - 312th Ftr. Wing protected Chengtu based B-29's until January 1945, then moved to northern China.

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

1. Gurney, Gene. *Five Down and Glory*. New York: G.P. Putnam & Sons; 1958, p. 172. Gurney explains, with his list of 14th and 10th Air Force victory credits, that air-to-ground victories were credited in the C.B.I. Theatre as well as air-to-air.
2. Craven, W.F. and Cate, J.L. *The Army Air Forces in World War II, Vol. IV*, pp. 529-545. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press; 1950.
3. Ibid, Craven & Cate, Vol. V, pp. 200-232, 252-272.
4. Liu, F.F. *A Military History of Modern China, 1924-1949*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press; 1956.
5. Capt. Reynolds noted that these Oscars — Ki.43's — were painted dark green on the upper surfaces, silver or clear aluminum on the undersides, with red stripes on the lower mid-wing area.
6. Personal communications, combat reports, and photographs of Maj. Thomas A. Reynolds.
7. Ibid.: Reynolds paper.
8. Scott, Robert L. *The Flying Tiger — Chennault of China*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1959, pp. 224-225, 230.
9. 14th A.F. Organization; see Craven & Cate, Vol. V. Also, Maurer Maurer, *Air Force Combat Units of World War II* (1961), and *Combat Squadrons of the Air Force Woeld War II*, (1969). U.S. Gov't Printing Office.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hugh Stephens Moseley is Chief Resident in Surgery at the University of Oregon Medical School. He is a native Arkansan, interested in aviation since he could read, and now does scale modelling of aircraft as a hobby. His interest in another Arkansan, Maj. Reynolds, as a fighter pilot in a little-known area of action during the War, brought this article. Dr. Moseley is also a member of the Oregon Historical Modelers Society.

THE ARTIST

Peter B. Mersky is also an aviation enthusiast for most of his life, and when asked to undertake some sketches for our marginal illustrations in this article he accepted readily. He graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design, is an officer in Naval Air Intelligence, holds a commercial/instrument rating, and flies whenever possible such airplanes as Stearman, T-33, TF-9J and F-4.

IDENTIFICATION NEEDED

William Bruce Arnold, Washington, D. C.

As a new-member of the AAHS, I am forwarding a picture with which someone in the Society may be able to assist me. On the left is my father, H.H. Arnold, in the center is his good friend George Brett, but the third officer is unknown to me and to General Brett's daughter, Dora Schriever.

The picture was probably taken at Crissy Field around 1922 or 1923. Perhaps someone in the Society has an idea who this officer may be. Any help you can give us would certainly be appreciated. (Write Wm. B. Arnold, 1625 Eye St., N.W. Suite 419, Washington, D.C.)

