

FLYING TIGERS

American Volunteer Group — Chinese Air Force



THE TIGER RAG

BURBANK, CALIFORNIA

December, 1964

Impressions of an Oriental Odyssey

Reunion in TAIPEI

By DON DWIGGINS ?

You take a planeload of Flying Tigers, open the bar and put the damn thing on autopilot and head West - Northwest, that is, Northwest to the Orient...and there you have the formula for a Grand Hotel yarn that nobody would believe. Along as a neutral observer, covering the Flying Tiger Reunion at Taipei, Taiwan. July 1-4, 1964, I saw and was con-



Here's where it all began - Preston Paull oversees Burma Bob Locke, Cliff Groh and Prexy Rossi putting up the where-to-go



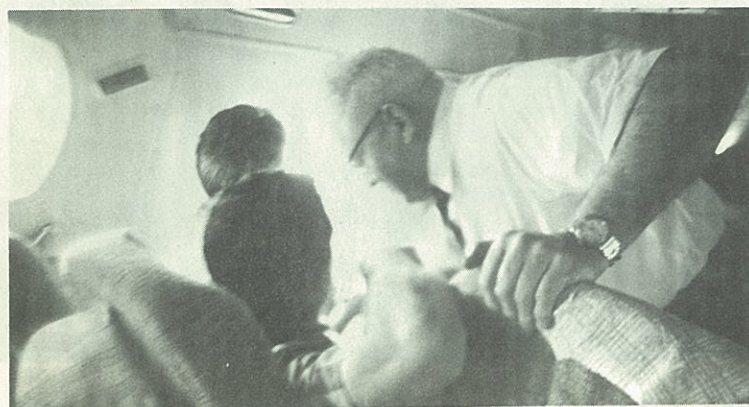
And this is the way it started - R. T. Smith Jim Bennett and Rossi carrying their "loot" aboard.



Our six house mothers. From bottom up, Marie Flesher, Ida Lono, Laura Direnzo, Judy Hatch, Ada Gardner and Colleen Carey.



The first thing we had was a drink. Don Dwiggins already in action, Rodewald and Neal conferring (on the left), and 'way in the back waiting patiently for his - Al Oldenburg.



Doc Richards was soon in action. His patient has a busted zipper, or something.

vinced that never, but never, will such a gathering of amazing eagles ever happen again.

You know the story - how Bob Prescott accepted the kind invitation of Generalissimo and Madame Kai-Shek to revisit Nationalist China (this time on the soil of old Formosa), and to bring the gang along.

Well, from wheels-up at LAX, it was easy to see why the Japs gave up in disgust a couple of decades back and handed China skies over to as improbable a bunch of aviators as ever flew AVG fighters and CNAC transports in anger.

Tiger publicist Len Kimball opened the ceremonies with a few well-chosen words: "The bar's open! Come and get it!" Catfish Raines, in charge of the steering apparatus up front, battled to trim tab as the gang rushed to the Canadair's tail, which fortunately did not swing open, as Kimball chanted, "What'll you have? Scotch...bourbon...gin...vodka..." and some nut in the rear yelled "Mix 'em all together!"

It was like that until SFO, when Catfish landed not once, not twice, but many, many times, and R. T. (Tadpole) Smith nudged young Bill Smith, heir to his father's good looks, and grinned, "That's how we damn near lost the war, son."



Somewhere across the Pacific, it looked like this - Doc Rich and Sue Shrewsbury in right foreground, with Bob Locke directly on the left.

Catfish redeemed himself at Cold Bay, Alaska - probably with the help of ice on the runway, Dick Rossi leered to Tex Hill. Tex later tried to explain to anybody who would listen just how HE would have brought her in. Abandoning the party, Raines took the next Tiger plane. East, anxious to get back to Fallon, Nevada, where his kids, Kathy, Billie Ann and Bob, raise thoroughbred Arabians.

Got to know Lem Wu, old China hand who debugged Allison engines for China Air Force, later switched to 23rd Fighter Group under Tex Hill. Along with Pappy Wu were his young charmers, Gladys, 15, Jannette, 16, and son Andy, 12.

The kids, in fact, loved the whole show, and the "Little Tigers" proved to be real Ambassadors of Good Will. Among the teen globe-trotters were Janie and Mark Watson, whose daddy Jules was a CNAC

jockey, and Don Rodewald's brood of beauties, Donna, Linda, Judy and Rosemary.

A gas-stop at Tokyo gave Burma Bob Locke a chance to catch Tex Hill with his short-snorter out, prompting Life fotog Bob Talbert to start a snorter collection of his own. Among the signers of Talbert's



...and now (Tex Hill explains), I was telling Maizie that flying the Pacific isn't so bad, after all.



Later on, it looked more and more like those on the right. Slumped 'way down is Bob Rengo; back a bit is Bob Prescott and the Rodewalds; on left, still in action, is R. T. Smith with cigarette at attention; next to him, Jim Bennett; Don McBride, left foreground.