

中華民國的空軍

中華民國一一〇年九月號 第九七六期

中華民國的空軍

ROC AIR FORCE



非疫情期間拍攝

防空部官兵35快砲操演

ISSN 1996-9973
9 771996 997001
GPN : 2002700002
定價：25元

Separated by Language and Culture but United by a Common Goal

THE LEGACY OF THE FLYING TIGERS

By Margaret Mills Kincannon

Soon after the year 1922 began, a male child was born on January 30 in a small agricultural community of the American South in Benton County, Arkansas. His parents gave their son the name James Henry Mills, but childhood friends called him by his lifelong nickname of "Hank". His father was a farmer who later became a laborer at a petroleum refinery and his mother, who bore two more sons, cared for their family and small but comfortable home in El Dorado, Arkansas. Hank completed twelve years of public school and graduated from high school in May 1941. Afterward, he took a job as a meatcutter at a locally-owned grocery store.

Half a world away, in Jian County, Andong Province in Manchuria, another boy baby was born on October 29 of the same year that Hank was born but in completely different circumstances. He was called Du Xing-quan by his family, although he would change his name in early adulthood. A fourteenth-generation descendant of Genghis Khan and therefore a member of the nobility, he enjoyed a life of privilege under the care of servants and his aristocratic parents on a grand estate. Following an early-childhood education provided by private tutors, he was enrolled in a western-style school. The Japanese occupied Manchuria when he was in sixth grade, and life changed completely. The family was forced to move to Tianjin in northeastern China and then to Jigongshan, Hubei Province, following the Marco Polo Bridge Incident and outbreak of war in 1937. Xing's father (at that time a university professor teaching law and business), his mother, and younger siblings moved to Xian in northwestern Shaanxi Province, while he went to Tianshui, Gansu Province, to complete high school. After graduating, he studied in the Economics Department at the National Northwest University in Xian and planned to become clerk in a bank after graduation.

It seems impossible that two people who came from such diverse backgrounds could ever meet, and especially that they would cooperate in support of a shared cause, yet the most remarkable set of circumstances would soon intervene to bring them together fighting as brothers in arms to defeat a common enemy.

For Hank, it all began on December 7, 1941, when a distraught radio announcer broke into regular Sunday afternoon programming to provide details of a surprise attack by the Japanese Imperial Navy against the United States Naval Base at Pearl Harbor on the island of Oahu, Territory of Hawaii. Like many thousands of other young Americans, his sense of patriotism and duty compelled him to enlist soon after. He requested placement in the U.S. Army Air Forces, later explaining, "I didn't want to walk on the ground and carry a rifle". His request was granted, and he began training that would qualify him to become a crew chief on B-25 Mitchell bombers. (To be continued)

FROM USA

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