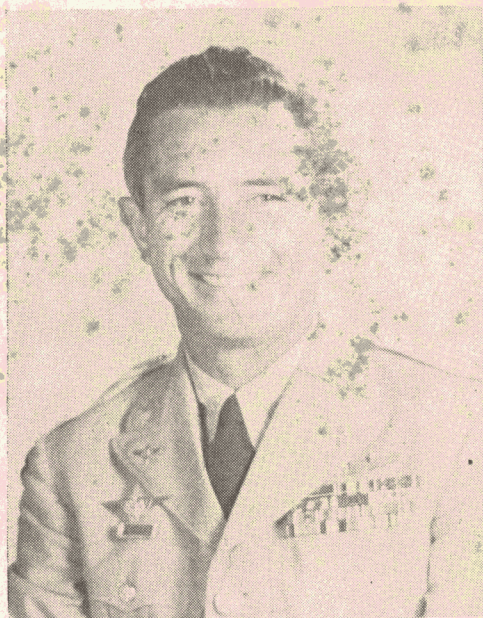


CBI's LEADING ACE



**Beloved 'Flying Tiger'
Downs 18 Jap Planes
In Colorful CBI Career**

Of middle stature, with a liberal sprinkling of grey in his hair, and of an age when pilots are usually held to be superannuated even for transport flying, "Pappy" defied the laws of nature about flying as confidently and victoriously as he once attacked thirty-two Zeros single-handedly.

On this occasion, he was making a routine flight between his Eastern China Base in his P-51 "Tommy's Dad," when he spotted sixteen enemy fighters at ten thousand feet, covering sixteen more at a lower altitude. "Pappy" attacked the lead flight head-on, concentrating on the leader, whom he shot down in flames. The other planes in this flight meanwhile got in some good deflection shots at the lone P-51. Explosive bullets hit its windshield, spraying the cockpit with flying glass and metal, cutting Herbst about the face and head. By this time, the other Jap flights had joined the fray. Half-blinded by blood in his eyes and with all but one of his guns jammed, Herbst nevertheless continued to fight. He singled out the leader of one of the flights and left his plane smoking. He then made several more passes and probably shot down another plane. His remaining gun then jammed and Herbst dived out and away, with one confirmed victory and one probable.

"WHO'S THE old duck wearing wings?" was the question that went around when 35-year-old fighter pilot, Capt. John C. Herbst, of Los Angeles, Calif., arrived to join the fighter group of the East China Wing of the 14th U. S. Air Force near the end of May, 1944.

By January, 1945, when he received his orders to go home for a leave, the whole answer was on record. The "Old Duck" — it was inevitable that the other very youthful fighter pilots should affectionately nickname him "Pappy" — became the all-time first-ranking Ace of the China and India-Burma Theaters, by shooting down eighteen Jap planes in aerial combat, in addition to destroying three on the ground, probably destroying two and damaging four in the air.

Major Herbst held the Silver Star, the Distinguished Flying Cross with four Oak Leaf Clusters, the Purple Heart, and the Air Medal with six Clusters and recommended for the Legion of Merit. He was never shot down and never had to bail-out of a plane, although he admits he has contemplated doing so with a damaged plane on several occasions.

Two days before this flight, "Pappy" had confirmed two bombers. He and his flight had just dive-bombed. Coming out of the clouds to dive-bomb a target near Shanghai, "Pappy" spotted two Val dive-bombers coming to investigate the smoke from the bombing. He maneuvered behind the two Vals as they came down to 2,000 feet, exploding one of them on the first pass. The second Val put up a fight which worked down to a very low altitude, with the Val trying to spin the P-51 into the ground. Herbst's outboard guns jammed early in the fight, but he finally succeeded in shooting off part of the Val's tail and it nosed over on its back when it attempted to belly-land in a rice paddy. Herbst then went down and finished it off.

"One of the greatest fighter pilots I ever saw," was the verdict on him by

Col. "Tex" Hill, long-time commander of the 23rd Fighter Group.

Col. Tex, though, was far from thinking that when he first met "Pappy." It was on the beach at Eglin Field, Florida, and Col. Hill and his wife were sunning themselves when they noticed a flier stunting over the water until his wings almost touched. Hill sent for the unknown pilot and ordered him grounded for sixty days. Thirty days later, the pilot—Herbst—entered Hill's office, a ground-weary man. "I can't stand it any longer, Colonel," he groaned, "I've just got to fly."

Moved by his visitor's obvious distress and assured that there'd be no more stunting near public places, Col. Hill relented and suspended the remainder of the punishment. Later, Hill returned to China to take command of the 23rd Fighter Group and arranged for Herbst's assignment to his outfit.

HERBST BECAME commander of the "Guerrilla" Fighter Squadron on June 27, 1944, a month after joining the group on the day that the enemy opened its biggest offensive of the China War,

against which Major Herbst and his great Squadron were to make some of the most distinguished history of the Army Air Forces.

"Pappy" himself minimized his accomplishments as a fighter pilot, considering his record as a fighter pilot considerably less important than his duties as a Squadron Commander. During his seven months' command, his Squadron, without losing a single pilot in aerial combat, shot down sixty-four enemy planes in the air, destroyed one hundred-sixty-two on the ground, probably destroyed nineteen and damaged forty-nine on the ground, and probably shot down fifteen and damaged forty-one in the air.

The squadron ruled a vast arc, which stretched from Canton and Hong Kong up the China Coast and Formosa Strait thru Swatow Amoy and Foochow to Shanghai and Nanking, thence west on the Yangtze River to Hankow. It daily staged out of Kienow and Nancheng, two U. S. air strips which were closer to Tokyo than any others in the world. Its complete score of enemy planes since its activation in the field in China included 135 planes



MAJOR HERBST poses on the wing of his famous plane, "Tommy's Dad," at Kunming Airfield. Photo furnished by Charles C. Herbst, brother.

confirmed in the air; 190 confirmed on the ground; 64 probables in the air; 24 probables on the ground; 89 damaged in the air, and 58 damaged on the ground. Approximately two-thirds of the accomplishments took place under Major Herbst's leadership.

The squadron was entirely surrounded and encircled by Jap ground forces. Its main base, Kanchow, was situated at the center of a circle with an average radius of 200 miles, around the perimeter of which were based approximately 1500 Jap planes. It was entirely cut off from all but air supply, which had to be flown in over enemy lines and airdromes. The squadron in time came to be known as "Pappy's Guerrillas," operating as it did entirely behind enemy lines in the manner of guerrillas.

At first in P-40's and then in P-51's, "Pappy's Guerrillas" so thoroughly ruled



"PAPPY" (center) studies intelligence photo showing damage by his squadron in a raid on Jap installations. Photo by Charles C. Herbst.

the air over East China that not one single Jap plane ever dared to make a daylight raid on any fields in East China, although the Guerrilla planes from these fields were daily dealing severe blows to Japanese shipping and consistently sweeping and continually inflicting crippling losses, although the only anti-aircraft defenses on the U. S. fields were .50 caliber machine guns salvaged from wrecked planes.

"Our greatest ambition," said the Major, "was to get the Japs to mass all the airpower they had in East China, which was considerable, and attack us in broad daylight. They didn't have the guts to do it, so we went after them."

MEMBERS OF his squadron, in discussing the commander's victories, like to speculate on how many planes he would have destroyed in a theater of operations where more Japanese planes could be encountered.

They point out that although Major Herbst's score of 18 aerial victories in the China Theater is not so impressive as scores made in other theaters, he had far fewer chances of encountering enemy air

opposition. "Bull session" opinion in the squadron held that Herbst flying in the ETO or Pacific Theater, might have run up the greatest individual score of the war. Squadron veterans point out, too, that Herbst was never greatly interested in trying to make or break records. Most of his time was devoted to squadron command activities, tactics and planning.

Herbst virtually flew his quota of one-hundred missions in the first three months of his service in the China Theater and after that was more or less supposed to be grounded from combat flying and to confine his aerial activity to administrative flights. Somehow or other, though, "Pappy" just seemed to run into Japs while flying administratively and "administered" down ten enemy planes in the period.

His theories on combat tactics can be summed up briefly: "My boys are always on the offense, and aggressiveness pays off. We hit them first, by surprise out of the sun, go in low and fast, shoot everything out of the air and then destroy the planes left on the ground. The way to beat the Jap is to get in and slug it out with him at close quarters. He can't take it."

One of the "Guerrillas" favorite operations was what they called "breaking in" new Jap pilots. Photo recon and intelligence sources would reveal the arrival of new Jap planes and Herbst would then take or send a flight to the airdrome to "orient" them. Once a carrier came into Swatow harbor and landed twelve Val dive-bombers. A flight of four "Guerrilla" P-51's took off and within two hours after the planes had been parked on the Swatow airdrome, seven of them were destroyed on the ground. The next day two Mustangs went back and finished off the other five.

With four planes and five-hundred gallons of gas, a "Guerrilla" flight once destroyed fifteen enemy aircraft at dawn on a Canton airdrome, setting some sort of record for economical offensive operations.

Herbst obtained his private pilot's license in 1932 in Los Angeles. Before entering the Army, he was a Los Angeles Petroleum Engineer and Income Tax Legal Specialist. He was graduated from the Huntington Park High School in Los Angeles and from the University of Southern

EDITOR'S NOTE: A sad and tragic ending to "Pappy" Herbst's exploits occurred on July 7, 1945, when he was killed in a jet plane crash during an air show at the Del Mar, California, Fair Grounds. He had just been married the day before.

California, where he majored in petroleum engineering in 1932. He then studied law at night school at Loyola University for four years while working as a petroleum engineer in the daytime. He was a member of the Wings Club of New York and the California Club of Los Angeles.

HERBST JOINED the USAAF in May 1942, becoming an instructor in fighter combat tactics with an operational training unit at Sarasota, Florida, for eight months. He then went to Eglin Field, Florida, where he was a test pilot and worked on AAF combat tactical problems. Next he was sent to Washington, D. C., to do combat intelligence work until February of 1944, when his plea for overseas service was finally granted and he was sent to China to join Col. Tex Hill's Fighter Group, later commanded by Col. Edward F. Rector, of Marshall, North Carolina. He departed from the U.S. on February 20, 1944 and arrived in China on May 7. He joined the 23rd Fighter Group as a Squadron Operations Officer and on June 27 he became Commanding Officer of "Pappy's Guerrillas" Squadron. A month later he was promoted to the rank of Major.

The day Herbst joined the group, the Japanese commenced their offensive which in the next eight months was to force the evacuation and demolition of the 14th Air Force's East China Bases. Throughout this period, Major Herbst's Squadron in cooperation with other fighter and bomber units waged their epic counter-offensive.

The enemy swept down from the Tungting Lake region and on down the Siang River in thousands of sampans, barges, power-boats and other river craft while their infantry, artillery, cavalry and motorized units sped down roads. Against these troops and supplies, 14th Air Force planes often flew as much as ten or twelve hours a day per plane in allsorts of weather and frequently when the ceiling was down to the hilltops. Fighters would sweep down the river and roads on the deck, mowing down unknown thousands of enemy troops and sinking countless river craft. Japanese prisoners of war later testified to the demoralizing fear these planes inspired in the advancing Japs whose own planes seldom dared to give them an air umbrella.

At length the enemy learned to travel at night, to disperse their forces and to take cover, considerably lessening their casualties. But these tactics also measurably slowed down the speed of their advance and gave Chinese troops more time to organize their resistance.

Chinese intelligence estimated more

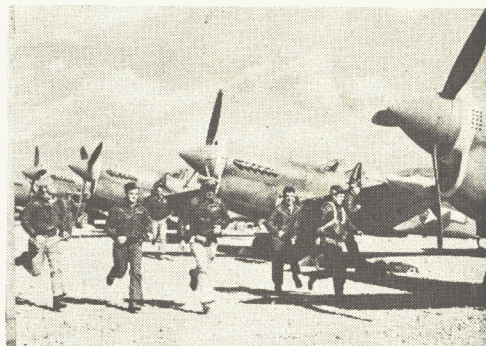
than 100,000 Japs were killed in the fighting between Changsha and the U. S. air strength in the area, Liuchow by 14th AAF planes, and Chinese troops. The American planes, although greatly outnumbered by Jap air strength, maintained absolute air supremacy and protected Chinese troops from Jap strafing and bombing.

The only Squadron losses occurred when low-flying P-40's were shot down by ground fire or collided with tree tops or ship masts. Herbst considered this type of flying much more dangerous and difficult than dog-fighting with Zeros and payed tribute to the ruggedness of the P-40's which had to absorb a great deal of punishment. "For ground support action of this type," he said, "the P-40 was hard to beat, but I'll take the P-51 every time to fight a Zero, dive and skip-bomb."

The ground support operations of the Squadron are best illustrated by the Battle of Hengyang, when Chinese and Japanese troops encircled each other concentrically, with Chinese troops attempting to relieve the beleaguered Hengyang garrison. During the 47 days of this battle, Herbst and his men steadily attacked enemy trenches, occupied towns, troop movements, gun positions, ammunition and fuel dumps, bivouac areas and pill boxes.

After an attack, Chinese troops would charge the targets with bayonets. Air ground liaison teams in contact with the P-40's would direct their activities and indicate precise targets. Planes would fly low enough for the pilots to look in the windows of compounds and see if Jap troops had taken shelter there.

On August 6, Herbst and a flight were supporting the Chinese ground forces at



MAJOR HERBST (center) with other pilots of the 23rd Fighter Group run for planes upon hearing the air raid alert. U.S. Army photo.

Hengyang when from twenty to twenty-five Jap planes appeared north of the city, enroute to strafe and bomb the Chinese

CBI's Leading Ace

forces. The flight took on these planes and destroyed four of them, probably destroyed two and damaged four. Major Herbst personally destroyed two and damaged one.

The squadron first operated out of Hengyang and then was forced to withdraw through the Lingling and Kweilin bases by the defeat of Chinese troops charged with airdrome defense. But although the airfields had to be evacuated and destroyed, the squadron and other units of the group never lost their supremacy in the air. After the loss of the Kweilin fields, the squadron was based at Kanchow from August 1st until the evacuation of Kanchow in January, 1945.

MAJOR HERBST was credited by his group commander with raising the morale of his organization to an "unprecedented level. He increased the effectiveness of his air raid warning system so thoroughly that although behind enemy lines and surrounded by vastly numerically superior enemy air strength within a radius of 300 miles, his planes were never surprised on the ground.

Enemy bombers hit the Kanchow base and its staging fields whenever weather permitted at night, but Herbst so dispersed his planes, that little damage was ever done to them.

Many sorties were flown on old gasoline hidden in the Chinese countryside for the Doolittle Mission and for a time bombs were secured by digging up those previously buried on the field to blow it up if Japs should advance too close to the air base. Crew Chiefs rebuilt shot-up planes overnight with salvaged parts and often ingeniously improvised entirely unorthodox repairs, which nevertheless allowed a plane to fly and fight the next day.

Of the Squadron achievements at Kanchow, Col. Rector wrote: "Herbst's squadron maintained an unbroken record for driving, hurrying attacks against the enemy. The initiative, resourcefulness, extraordinary tactical ability, inspiring leadership and personal courage of Major Herbst have been an example to all his associates."

While at Kanchow, the squadron destroyed 25,000 tons of enemy shipping, probably destroyed 13,320 tons and damaged 51,790 tons off the China Coast and in harbors and on the Yangtze River. On one occasion, Herbst tackled a convoy of transports escorted by three destroyers. He had been on a mission to Hong Kong, where he shot down one of two attacking fighters. Then he saw a seaplane skimming along in the harbor and exploded it



ACE HERBST ready to take off on another mission in China.

with one burst. Still not satisfied with the day's work, he went east of Hong Kong, where he saw four 300-foot vessels with destroyer escort. He strafed one of them, damaging it, and causing many casualties among the crew.

Another time, he and a flight of his men burned a Japanese seaplane base, sunk a freighter and then caught five-hundred Jap Marines parading in formation on an island off the China Coast, leaving most of them casualties from strafing. Attacks on shipping were always hazardous due to the presence of destroyers and gunboats in the coastal and river harbors, in addition to heavy anti-aircraft defenses.

HERBST AND his squadron often worked in close coordination with U.S. Navy men along the coast and out over the China Sea. He was particularly proud of the Army-Navy cooperation, which resulted in a successful consummation of what was facetiously referred to as the Kate Project. It seems Navy men had noted the existence and plotted the route of an aerial ferry service from Shanghai to Formosa and vice-versa, over the China Sea. The Navy submitted the data to Herbst, who one day flew out over the China Sea between Shanghai and Formosa and, intercepting a bomber and a transport, shot both down in flames. Herbst and the Navy men considered this a great joke on the Japs.

Herbst was noted among his fellow pilots for his vigilance in combat. His specialty was taking Japs planes off U.S. pilots' tails. On July 15, 1944, he led a P-40 mission of six planes to dive-bomb enemy anti-aircraft positions and barracks at Siangtan. When the run was completed, 16 Jap fighters were sighted. Herbst dived down from 7,000 feet on the tail of a member of his flight. "Pappy" shot a Jap down in flames and then pulled up from his dive to shoot down another.

Another time he was participating in an attack which neutralized Jap air power in the Canton area. Twenty enemy fight-

ers attempted interception and Herbst engaged three fighters which were diving on the tail of another U. S. plane strafing the airdrome. He shot down two of the Japs, but the third got away, which was a considerable disappointment to "Pappy."

What Herbst calls the most "personally satisfactory" mission which he ever planned was the January 17, 1945, mission to Shanghai. P-51's from Kanchow and Sui-chwan took part in the raid which took the enemy completely by surprise. Seventy-two enemy aircraft were destroyed, eleven damaged and eight probably destroyed without the loss of a single American plane of the sixteen which made the raid. Herbst, himself, shot down one of the two Jap planes which got off the ground and attempted to defend the Shanghai airdromes.

Three days later the attack was repeated, although Herbst did not this time accompany the raiders. In all, a total of 94 Jap planes were destroyed, 26 damaged and 40 probably destroyed in the two missions.

Another mission "Pappy" likes to recall is the Christmas Day raid on Nanking, which resulted in the destruction of the railroad ferry which linked north and

south-bound traffic across the Yangtze River and tied up rail transportation throughout East China. Herbst's squadron, incidentally, destroyed, probably destroyed in the air and on the ground, approximately 50 Jap aircraft that day.

In his 144 missions in 400 combat hours, Herbst never had to turn back from a mission due to plane failure, a fact which he attributes to the zealous care lavished on his planes by a series of outstanding crew chiefs. Among them were T/Sgt. William E. Shipman, of Palestine, Ill., T/Sgt. P. E. Wingate, of Plaindealing, Louisiana and T/Sgt. Edgar E. Lane, of Vinita, Oklahoma.

Herbst had a son, Tommy, in 1945 a student at the Palomar School for Boys near Los Angeles, California. Both of his planes were named "Tommy's Dad," after his son. Tommy was already an accomplished flyer, at least his father claimed he was, and had ridden piggy-back in his dad's P-38 in the States. Major Herbst's dissatisfaction with a piece of flying would once in a while vent itself with the indignant declaration: "Why, my young son could fly better than that." —

—THE END



VIEW OF THE U.S. Army Hospital at Kweilin, China. Other U.S. installations faintly visible against mountains in background. U. S. Army photo.