

The Flying Tigers: A Lesson in International Cooperation and Selflessness

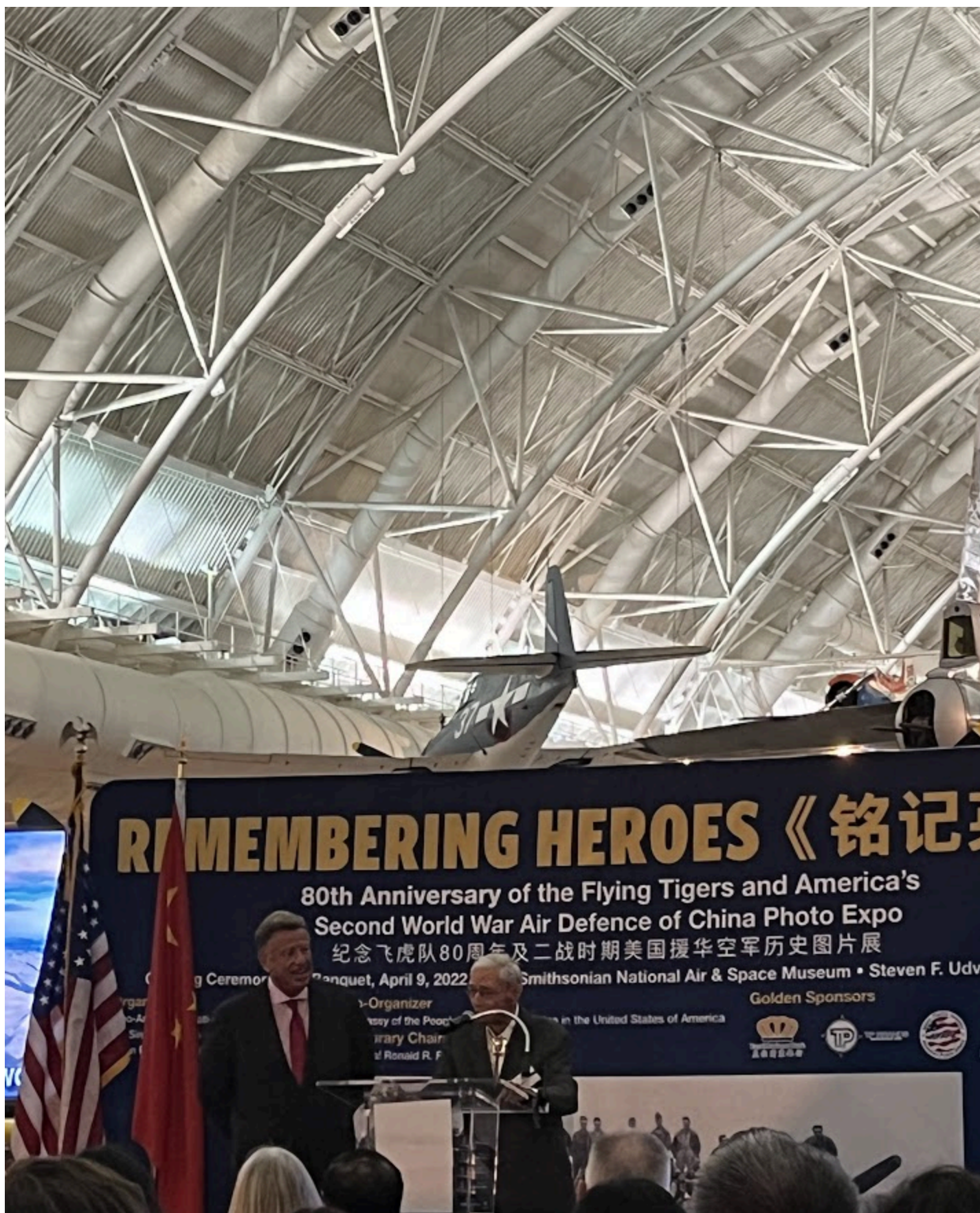
Southwest Airlines is proud to be the official airline of APAPA, whose mission is to empower the API community through education, leadership, and active participation in civic and public affairs. Our partnership supports their nationwide internship programs which provide leadership development workshops and training programs to college-age students.

As part of our partnership, Southwest Airlines proudly sponsored a celebration honoring the 80th anniversary of the Flying Tigers.

In 1942 the United States military sent three squadrons of young American pilots and ground support personnel, some no older than 22 years of age, to China to support the allied efforts. Most of these men departed the U.S. with a one-way ticket in hand.

Initially named the American Volunteer Group (AVG), but later popularized as the Flying Tigers, this group of young pilots volunteered to fly for the Chinese Air Force during World War II. By 1940, Japanese forces had nearly decimated the Chinese fleet and gained control over eastern China, specifically Beijing and Shanghai. At this point, the Chinese Air Force could not hold on much longer and the AVG jumped in to help.

"A group of us Americans went to China 80 years ago to help fight the war against the Japanese," shared 101-year-old Flying Tiger pilot, Harry Moyer, during the 80th Anniversary of the Flying Tigers at the NASA Air and Space Museum this past April. One aspect of Harry's mission involved the aerial protection of supplies traveling through Chinese airspace and over the infamous "hump," a nickname for the eastern end of the Himalayan Mountains.





Flying Tiger pilot, Harry Moyer, speaking at the 80th Anniversary Celebration. Flying Tiger pilot, Harry Moyer, speaking at the 80th Anniversary Celebration.

Beginning in April of 1941, the Flying Tigers arrived in China. Disguised as schoolteachers, clergyman, and businessman, the volunteers assumed civilian status to arrive undetected. Though their arrival began in April, the American pilots did not see action until December 1941, 12 days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Under the leadership of retired Air Corps Captain Claire Lee Chennault, the three squadrons, nicknamed “Adam and Eves,” “the Panda Bears,” and the “Hell’s Angels,” began to flex their aerial prowess in infamously-painted P-40 Warhawks, marked with Chinese colors.



A P-40 Warhawk, or Flying Tiger, in the NASA Air and Space Museum in Dulles, VA. A P-40 Warhawk, or Flying Tiger, in the NASA Air and Space Museum in Dulles, VA.

“The Chinese impression of the first fighter pilots that were there knocking down the Japanese bombers was that of a tiger,” said Harry. “We became known as the Fei Hu or Flying Tigers. That designation, given to the American flyers by Chinese people, continues to be held in high esteem through these many, many years.”

By July of 1942, when the AVG was absorbed into the U.S. Army, Captain Chennault and his three squadrons took down an official count of 299 Japanese planes, both in the air and on the ground across Burma, Thailand, and China. The Flying Tigers sustained a loss of only eight American pilots.

This past April, we celebrated the 80th Anniversary Celebration of the Flying Tigers at the NASA Air and Space Museum. Standing beneath the underlit mouth of a P-40 Warhawk, the story of the Flying Tigers was told once again. Full of vivid imagery and sharp wit, a couple of remaining Flying Tiger Pilots, including Harry Moyer and Robert Moore, reminded the crowd of the sacrifices they made as young men.

The event also featured speeches from public officials, legislators, and executive leadership within the Asian Pacific Islander American Public Affairs Association (APAPA), one of the co-hosts for the event. APAPA is a nonpartisan, non-profit organization committed to advancing AAPI communities through increased leadership and civic engagement—volunteers work tirelessly to make sure Asian Pacific Islander American history does not fall by the wayside.

Among the many stories, Chinese Ambassador, Qin Gang, spoke of the lasting impact this collaboration had on the Chinese people and the effect the peaceful cooperation had on the international world.



Henry Yin, Chair of the APAPA National Governing Board, speaking with Ambassador Qin Gang.
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The Flying Tigers will forever be a steadfast symbol of peaceful relations between the United States and China, and it is our duty now to carry on their evergreen legacy of international cooperation.

