

= Clinton D. " Casey " Vincent =

Clinton D. " Casey " Vincent (November 29 , 1914 ? July 5 , 1955) was an American flying ace who became the second youngest general officer in United States Army Air Forces history . Vincent was one of Claire Chennault 's two top fighter commanders in the China Burma India Theater of World War II , and served as the model for two comic strip characters by Milton Caniff : " Colonel Vince Casey " , and " Brigadier General P.G. ' Shanty ' Town " .

Vincent planned and carried out daring offensive air tactics in China , forming the 14th Air Force Forward Echelon which staged out of forward airfields to attack the enemy unexpectedly . The successful concept was twinned and reorganized by Chennault into two mixed @-@ aircraft groups , with Vincent commanding one of them , the 68th Composite Wing . A string of Allied victories throughout 1943 caused the Japanese to plan a major retaliatory move . Beginning in May 1944 , the airmen were hit repeatedly and forced into retreat as the Japanese implemented Operation Ichi @-@ Go . Vincent 's men demolished their valuable airbases and fell back to Chennault 's stronghold at Kunming . Vincent returned to the U.S. afterward , his tour of duty complete .

Back home , Vincent was put in command of a training wing and in 1946 was asked to teach at the Air War College . Following this , he held the position of second @-@ in @-@ command of the Western Air Defense Force . Vincent died of a heart attack in 1955 . The United States Air Force (USAF) named an air base after him in 1956 : the Vincent Air Force Base in Yuma , Arizona . The airfield was turned over to the Marines in 1962 , and is today the very busy Marine Corps Air Station Yuma (Vincent Field) .

= = Early career = =

Clinton Dermott Vincent was born in 1914 in the small town of Gail , Texas . His parents , Carvin Wyoming Vincent and the former Rosa Lee Burgess , produced 10 or 11 children ? Vincent was the youngest . He was nicknamed " Casey " from youth . While still a small child , Vincent moved with his family to Natchez , Mississippi , where he went to school . After excelling in high school , Vincent was appointed to the United States Military Academy at West Point , becoming a cadet on July 1 , 1932 . Vincent graduated on June 12 , 1936 , and became a second lieutenant .

Vincent transferred to the Air Corps and took primary flight training at Randolph Field in Texas , about 500 miles (800 km) from his parents back home . In January 1937 , during his primary training , his mother died in Natchez at the age of 65 . Following primary , Vincent took the attack course in advanced flying at Kelly Field in San Antonio , Texas . During a dance held at the officer 's club , he met Margaret " Peggy " Hennessey , a young woman with an infant daughter , and fell in love . In November 1937 , he was posted operations officer for the 19th Pursuit Squadron at Wheeler Field near Pearl Harbor . Hennessey traveled to Hawaii to be with him , and on February 10 , 1938 , they married ? the couple celebrated the birth of a daughter named Thayer on December 17 . The young father rose in rank to first lieutenant in June 1939 , then was promoted to captain on October 7 , 1940 . In November 1940 , Vincent transferred to the newly formed 35th Pursuit Group at Hamilton Field in Northern California where he served as squadron commander . The Group trained in several fighter aircraft types , including Seversky P @-@ 35s , P @-@ 36 Hawks , P @-@ 39 Airacobras and P @-@ 40 Warhawks . Vincent advanced to group operations officer , then executive officer , then in December 1941 was made group commander .

On December 5 , two days before the attack on Pearl Harbor , Vincent 's wife pinned the gold leaves of a major on his shoulders . That evening , the 35th Pursuit Group shipped out for overseas duty in Manila , to join the group 's 21st and 34th Squadrons already there . The next day Peggy Vincent began to drive her two daughters to San Antonio to be with family . On December 7 when Hawaii was attacked by Japanese naval forces , the unarmed ship carrying Vincent , traveling with no escort , was ordered to return immediately to San Francisco Bay . Vincent remained in California for another month , joined by his wife and daughter , during which time he learned that Manila had fallen , and that fellow Group pilot Sam Marrett , a friend from West Point , had died in its defense . On January 12 , 1942 , the USS Mariposa sailed in convoy with Vincent aboard , headed for the Far

East .

= = China = =

Vincent arrived in Melbourne , Australia , in early February , then sailed in a different convoy to Perth . In March , he sailed to Karachi , India , and was posted to Karachi American Air Base , one of the more distant ports that supplied The Hump . There , Vincent served as Director of Pursuit Training for the Tenth Air Force at the rank of lieutenant colonel . Wishing for a combat post , in November 1942 he was ordered by Clayton Bissell , commander Tenth Air Force , to transfer to China to join General Claire Chennault and his China Air Task Force (CATF) , a group formed from the Flying Tigers . Bissell 's orders specified Vincent take the position of Chennault 's executive officer , to apply a dose of West Point regimen to the haphazard CATF paperwork , but Chennault , irked at this maneuver by his 2 @, @ 200 @-@ mile (3 @, @ 500 km) distant superior , instead assigned Vincent operations officer . Three days into the new job , Vincent wrote in his diary , " Any similarity between the China Air Task Force and a military organization is purely accidental . " He observed that administrative procedures were poor . " ... the Group just runs by itself . All Colonel Scott (Robert Lee Scott , Jr .) cares about is fighting ? and he is good at that ! " .

Vincent cared little what title he served under ? he just wanted to fly in combat . After instituting procedural changes regarding the format of official reports originating from CATF , he assigned himself his first air combat flight on November 22 , escorting bombers against the harbor of Haiphong on the coast of French Indochina , during which he dropped a bomb from his fighter into the harbor 's dock area . Five days later , he scored his first aerial victory : a fixed @-@ undercarriage Japanese fighter he encountered during an attack on Canton in which 10 B @-@ 25s and 22 P @-@ 40s downed some 16 to 22 enemy aircraft . Vincent noted that he was effectively serving three desk jobs ? " ' Exec ' , ' Intelligence ' , and ' Operations ' " ? but that Chennault was pleased to find his new administrator a skilled pilot eager to fight .

In the final weeks of 1942 , the CATF was often grounded by bad weather . Vincent flew combat in Peggy I on December 12 , but two days later he was ordered by Chennault , at Bissell 's insistence , to refrain from flying a mission he had planned . Another pilot took Peggy I on that mission but belly @-@ landed the aircraft on a road . Vincent borrowed a different aircraft to fly reconnaissance missions on December 17 and 19 , but stayed on the ground again during a short visit by Bissell , to satisfy his expectations . General Joseph Stilwell flew in on December 22 to award Chennault the Distinguished Service Medal , and to take him to Chungking , the provisional wartime capital of China . Left in charge of CATF for the rest of December , Vincent led the combat missions he put together . On December 24 he was awarded the Silver Star for his combat performance .

In early January 1943 , Vincent was officially made executive officer of the CATF , taking over the multiple leadership roles held previously by Scott and by Merian C. Cooper , who were both heading home . He checked out in a C @-@ 53 transport , flew it to Chungking for a " short visit with Generalissimo Chiang Kai @-@ Shek " , and was promoted to colonel . On January 24 , Albert " Ajax " Baumler flew a captured and repaired Mitsubishi A6M Zero from Kweilin , and Vincent put it through its paces to become one of only five pilots in the " Zero Club " ? China @-@ based U.S. pilots who test @-@ flew this particular aircraft . Starved of fuel and supplies in February , the CATF mounted few missions ; during the same period , Commanding General of the USAAF Henry H. Arnold visited with Chennault and Vincent to inform them that a group of fuel @-@ hungry heavy bombers were to be assigned to the CATF , under Colonel Royden Eugene Beebe , Jr .

= = = Fourteenth Air Force = = =

On March 10 , 1943 , the China Air Task Force became the Fourteenth Air Force , and Vincent was made chief of staff . He prevailed upon Chennault to let him take a fighter squadron deeper into enemy territory via advance bases where the fliers would stop to refuel and re @-@ arm . In May 1943 , a forward echelon commanded by Vincent with Tex Hill as vice commander was flown out of bases in east China , along the Hengyang ? Kweilin line . This bold thrust into enemy @-@ held

territory put all major Japanese airbases from north China to Indochina and Thailand under threat of U.S. air attack . Flying Peggy II , a new P @-@ 40K he received on June 2 , Vincent racked up four more aerial victories , making him an ace , then number six on August 26 , 1943 . For this , he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Legion of Merit ; the latter " for outstanding leadership of a small force , which , against numerically superior air strength , succeeded in disrupting enemy communications and routing troop columns . " Chennault forbade him from any further combat missions .

Meanwhile , back home in San Antonio , Texas in early 1943 , Peggy Vincent wrote to cartoonist Milton Caniff to tell him that her husband was working under Chennault in China , much like the characters in Caniff 's comic strip Terry and the Pirates . Peggy Vincent sent Caniff photographs of her husband and told the cartoonist about his flying exploits . Caniff worked the flier into his comic strip as " Colonel Vince Casey " around March 1943 . In September and October 1943 , Vincent was rotated back home on leave during which he met Caniff . Nine months after the visit , a second daughter was born to the Vincents , named Patricia .

Upon his return to CBI , Vincent was informed that reconnaissance flights over Formosa (Taiwan) showed a growing concentration of Japanese aircraft . To Vincent , they appeared vulnerable to attack from advance bases , so he and Hill planned a long @-@ range mission . On Thanksgiving Day , November 25 , 1943 , Vincent sent Hill in command of a mixed force of eight early Allison @-@ engined P @-@ 51 Mustangs , eight P @-@ 38 Lightnings and fourteen B @-@ 25 Mitchells against 100 bombers and 112 fighters at Hsinchu Air Base ? the attackers destroyed 15 of 20 defending fighters as well as 27 enemy bombers on the ground without loss to themselves . Four days later flying escort to B @-@ 24 Liberator heavy bombers , Vincent led the 23d Fighter Group against Tien Ho airdrome at Canton ? the group shot down 13 of 20 defending fighters .

The Formosa attack was one of the most devastating in the CBI Theater ? it catalyzed the Japanese to lay plans to invade and seize the advance airfields Vincent had developed in east China . These plans became one of the two primary goals of Operation Ichi @-@ Go , Japan 's 1944 invasion of east China .

As an expansion of the 14th Air Force Forward Echelon , the 68th Composite Wing was formed in December 1943 . Vincent commanded the 68th for its first year . The mixed unit was composed of fighters , fighter bombers and medium bombers , flown by both American and Chinese airmen . Vincent flew a B @-@ 25 Mitchell bomber to lead his men in some of the bombing raids . More than 500 @, @ 000 tons of Japanese shipping were sunk by Vincent 's airmen , and the Japanese air power was greatly reduced south of the Yangtze River . On June 2 , 1944 , Vincent was promoted to temporary brigadier general , the second youngest general officer in the USAAF . It had taken him only seven years to rise from second lieutenant to general . An article about the meteoric rise of young military officers was printed in Time on June 19 , 1944 . Among other officers mentioned , Vincent was described as 6 feet (1 @. @ 8 m) tall , 175 pounds (80 kg) , a six @-@ kill ace and the prototype for the cartoon character Vince Casey . Of Vincent , Caniff said that he " picked his brain " about living and fighting conditions in China .

Vincent commanded the 68th Composite Group with Tex Hill as his deputy during the whole of the Japanese Operation Ichi @-@ Go of 1944 . The Americans in their advance bases were thrown on the defensive . In late June , Vincent ordered the evacuation of the base built at Hengyang , destroying it with explosives so that the Japanese could not make use of the buildings or the airstrip . Directly afterward , Vincent was called to attend a formal dinner with American and Chinese generals and ambassadors , honoring Vice President Henry A. Wallace who was on a fact @-@ finding mission . Meeting after dinner in his office , Vincent told Wallace " the unvarnished truth ? that , barring a miracle , the Japanese will have all of east China by July 15 ! "

Japanese supply problems in east China were as critical as American ones , and the Japanese advance was slowed until September when Vincent was forced to retreat and destroy his advance base at Tanchuk . The same treatment befell his own headquarters at Kweilin in October . As he circled Kweilin one final time in his command B @-@ 25 , he said to Time magazine writer Theodore H. White (who was evacuating as well) , " I 'm going to write a book about this campaign . I 'm going to call it Fire and Fall Back . " A month later , Vincent 's HQ , relocated to Liuchow , was

abandoned , with the 68th retreating to the 14th Air Force stronghold at Kunming . On December 13 , 1944 , both Hill and Vincent completed their tours of duty and left China , Vincent to command the 30th Training Wing at Turner Field in Georgia .

= = Postwar career = =

In 1946 , Vincent reverted to the permanent rank of captain and began teaching at the Air War College . During this time , the United States Air Force (USAF) was formed from the USAAF . From 1949 to 1955 , Vincent rose in rank , reaching temporary brigadier general once again in 1951 . A son was born to him , named Clinton D. Vincent , Jr . , nicknamed Casey Junior .

In 1951 Caniff , who started a new comic strip entitled Steve Canyon four years earlier , used Vincent as a model for a new character , this time making him the youthful " Brigadier General P.G. ' Shanty ' Town " . Caniff made General Town into a hard @-@ working peacetime general , concerned with the defense of America .

In 1953 , Vincent was placed second in command under Major General Walter E. Todd , Commander Western Air Defense Force . Todd 's station was at Hamilton Air Force Base near San Francisco . As Vice Commander , Vincent took an active role in defense developments such as the EC @-@ 121 Warning Star , a large radar @-@ equipped aircraft that held a rotating crew of 31 for extended flights , used to detect the approach of enemy aircraft and to coordinate fighter interception . Vincent held the position until mid @-@ 1955 .

= = Death and legacy = =

In 1955 , Vincent was ordered to Ent Air Force Base in Colorado Springs , Colorado where he was to serve as deputy chief of staff for operations of the Continental Air Command . On July 5 at the age of 40 , after one full day at his new post , Vincent went to bed at his residence on the air base and died of a heart attack in his sleep . His wife , three daughters and one son were still at their residence on Hamilton AFB in California , preparing to move , when they received word . Caniff responded to the tragic news by having his character General Town die from overwork .

On September 1 , 1956 , Yuma Air Force Base was renamed Vincent Air Force Base in Vincent 's honor . A plaque commemorating the event was unveiled by Vincent 's widow , Peggy Vincent , at a ceremony held on October 12 .

In 1975 , Vincent 's war diaries were made into a book : Fire and Fall Back : the World War Two " CBI " story of " Casey " Vincent , compiled and edited by author Glenn E. McClure . " Tex " Hill said of Vincent and the diaries " He was strong , smart ? just one hell of a good man . He was never recognized for what he did . He handled it well in China . But you could tell in his diary that he felt like he 'd been left hanging . "