

A Tiger shares his memories



MARTHA RIAL | Times

A member of the storied WWII Flying Tigers lives quietly in Palm Harbor.

Edwin "Ed" Janski, 92, lives at Bayou Gardens assisted living facility in Palm Harbor. Janski served during World War II with the American Volunteer Group, also known as the Flying Tigers. About 15 members of the group are alive today.

A PALM HARBOR s a propeller specialist, Edwin "Ed" Janski was responsible for keeping the Flying Tigers' shark-nosed Curtiss-Wright P-40 Tomahawks in the air. Janski, who now lives in Palm Harbor, was in his early 20s when he was recruited out of airplane mechanic school at Chanute Field (later Chanute Air Force Base) in Illinois to serve with the newly formed American Volunteer Group, also called the Flying Tigers.

The private military force contracted with the Chinese Nationalist government to help protect against Japanese aggression in the months leading up to America's entrance into World War II.

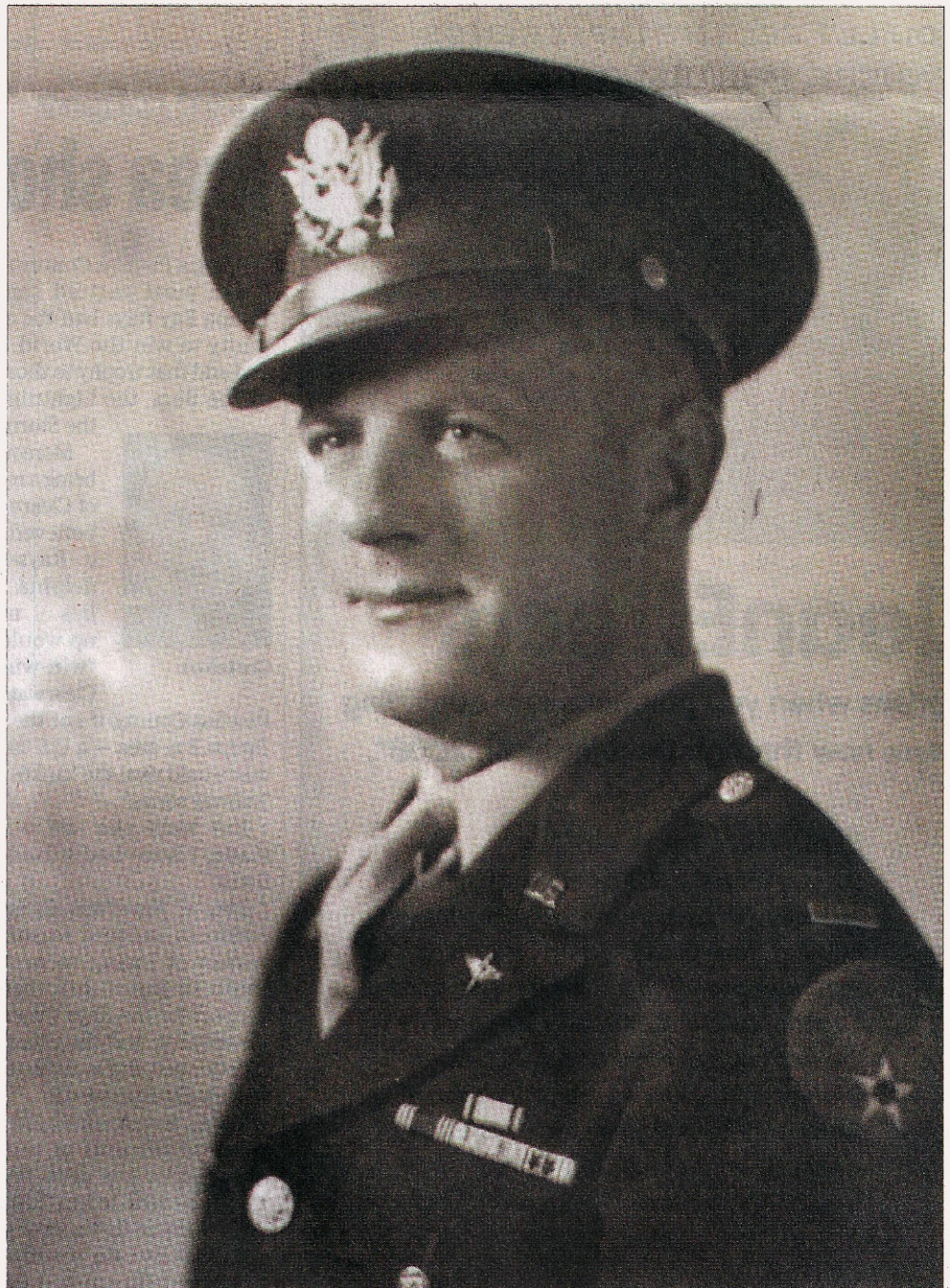
Intrigued by the possibility of adventure and lured by a \$500 a month salary — a hefty sum in the early 1940s — Janski said he never gave the danger a second thought.

Janski, one of only 15 or so surviving members of the AVG, said recently that the Flying Tigers inspired faith in the dark days following the Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor.

"There was a lot of fear about the future of the United States, so when the Flying Tigers came on the scene it gave people more confidence in the U.S. military," he said.

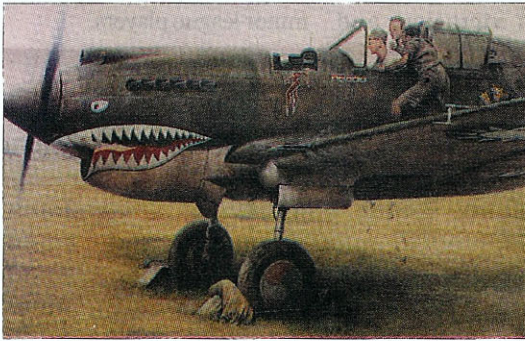
After serving with AVG, Janski was commissioned into the Army Air Forces in 1941. He served in the Korean War and retired as an Air Force reservist after 30 years of service.

Today the 92-year-old retired lieutenant colonel spends his time at Bayou Gardens assisted living facility doing crossword puzzles, watching his beloved Chicago Bears and taking day trips to the racetrack to bet on horses.



Courtesy of Ed Janski

Propeller specialist Janski's job was to keep the Flying Tigers' shark-nosed Curtiss-Wright P-40 Tomahawks in the air. He later served in the Army Air Forces.



A lithograph by John D. Shaw titled *Shark Sighting* features Janski standing in the back of the cockpit of a P-40 fighter plane.

The AVG leader

The American Volunteer Group was formed by Claire L. Chennault, a captain in the Army Air Corps who retired from active duty in 1937 to act as a civilian adviser to Chiang Kai-shek, Nationalist Chinese president during World War II. In late 1940, Chennault proposed the creation of an all-volunteer American air wing that would be part of a covert mission to help defend China against Japanese aggression. Many of the pilots who signed up resigned their mili-

tary commissions to join.

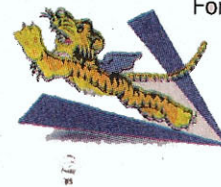
The group helped the Chinese Air Force protect critical supply lines along the Burma Road. The AVG first saw aerial combat on Dec. 20, 1941, when the Japanese launched an attack on Kunming, the eastern terminus of the Burma Road. Over the next 14 months, the Flying Tigers became a media sensation as they racked up victories against the Japanese in China and Burma. The group was incorporated into the U.S. Army Air Forces in July 1942 as the 23rd Pursuit Group.

The unmistakable Flying Tigers

Chennault has been quoted as saying he never knew where the term Fly-

ing Tigers originated. But he explained that the shark tooth design painted on the noses of the group's P-40s was borrowed from an illustration he'd seen of a Brit-

ish Royal Air Force squadron serving in the Libyan desert. The design was "apt and fearsome," he said in an autobiographical account, *Way of a Fighter*.



For information on the Flying Tigers, visit the Web site at www.flyingtigersavg.com.