

Henry H. Rinehart



The 1930s were a magical era for the world of flight. In America, post WWI technological advances came fast and furious and America's youth was captivated. Air races, such as the famous Cleveland Air Races, barnstormers at county fairs, books, movies, radio adventures – and local aviators – all influences would-be pilots. By the late 1930s war had begun and air power would play a significant role. September of 1939 saw the Nazi Blitzkrieg of Poland and the fall of France in 1940.

At the time, America was neutral, but many young men longed to join the fight against Nazi aggression. Many of them wanted to be pilots. One of the requirements to join the U.S. Army Air Corps was two years of college, but college was not an option for many young men. The British, however, only required a high school diploma and England needed pilots. Many enthusiastic young American high school graduates went to Canada and joined the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). One of them was Henry Rinehart.

Rinehart, a graduate of Somerset Township High School in Ohio, enlisted in October of 1941 and was accepted into the RCAF. Upon graduation, he became a flight instructor at #3

Bombing and Gunnery school in McDonald Airfield in Manitoba, Canada.

Rinehart served with the RCAF until May of 1944, when he requested a discharge in order to join the U.S. Army Air Corps. His last day of service with the RCAF was May 28, 1944 – his first day with the Army Air Corps was May 29, 1944.

Now a U.S. airman, Rinehart requested and received posting as a fighter pilot trainee. His training took place in Florida with the 3rd Fighter Command. In March of 1945, confirmed as a P-51 fighter pilot, he was assigned to the 23rd Fighter Group, 14th Air Force and was stationed in the China-Burma Theater (CBI). The 23rd Fighter Group, still under the command of General Claire Chennault was formed around the nucleus of what had been called the “Flying Tigers”.

Rinehart became part of the 76th Fighter Squadron of the 23rd Fighter Group. By then the P-40 Warhawk aircraft had been replaced by the P-51 Mustang fighter. Also gone were the colorful shark’s teeth decoration. The code name for the 76th was “Pontiac” and their p-51’s carried an Indian-head logo on the tail, in memory of Pontiac – the Ottawa chief that fought the British in the American Great Lakes region in the 1763-64 conflicts.

While with the 78th, Rinehart flew several combat missions. He was sent home on December 25th, 1945. He was officially released from active duty on February 13, 1946 when he joined the Air Force Reserves. He retired from the Reserves in 105 and passed away in 2003 at the age of 86.

Rinehart became a member of the “Caterpillar Club” when he was forced to bail out of his P-51 during a training mission due to engine failure.