

The American Fighter Aces Association
Oral Interviews
The Museum of Flight
Seattle, Washington

David L. “Tex” Hill

Interviewed by: Eugene A. Valencia

Interview Date: circa 1960s

Abstract:

In this brief oral history, fighter ace David L. “Tex” Hill is interviewed about his military service with the United States Armed Forces during World War II. He describes his wartime experiences as a fighter pilot, including his time with the American Volunteer Group in China and his time with the 412th Fighter Group, the first American unit to fly jets. Topics discussed include aerial combat tactics, a combat mission over Hengyang, and Hill’s flight in a captured Japanese “Zeke” fighter plane.

The interview is conducted by Eugene A. Valencia during an unspecified event, likely a Naval Aviators’ reunion. During the interview, Hill refers to Valencia as “Henry.”

Biography:

The son of Presbyterian missionaries, David L. “Tex” Hill was born on July 13, 1915 in Kwangju, Korea. He joined the United States Navy in 1938 but resigned his commission in 1941 to join the American Volunteer Group, also known as the Flying Tigers. After the Flying Tigers disbanded in July 1942, Hill continued to serve in China with the group’s successor, the 23rd Fighter Group of the United States Army Air Forces. In 1944, he took command of the 412th Fighter Group, the first American unit to fly jets. Hill left the Army Air Forces after World War II and joined the Texas Air National Guard, which he served with during the Korean War. He later joined the Air Force Reserve and retired as a brigadier general in 1968. Hill passed away in 2007.

Biographical information courtesy of: Boyce, Ward J., ed., American fighter aces album. Mesa, Ariz: American Fighter Aces Association, 1996.

Restrictions:

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Transcript:

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David L. “Tex” Hill

[START OF INTERVIEW]

00:00:00

[Discussion of aerial combat tactics]

EUGENE A. VALENCIA: This is my distinct pleasure to introduce Colonel Tex Hill. I know when I went through training here at Pensacola, and later to a fighter squadron, we looked at the tactics, the record made by Tex Hill and the AVGs, who were instrumental in devising the tactics that we used. And as I mentioned with Frank Lawlor, they were the ones that, materially, not only laid the ground rules, but showed us how to accomplish our mission in the Pacific.

Colonel Hill, may I ask you if we might reminisce a bit and discuss all these tactics? Your first in the AVGs or some of the most important days that you recall, sir?

00:00:49

DAVID L. HILL: Well, Henry, I'll tell you, our tactics were actually very simple. We had started out in the Navy, as you know. We used to fly a three-ship formation.

EAV: Yes, sir.

DLH: And then when we went to China, we went into the two-ship formation, which Chennault [Claire Lee Chennault] had pointed out to us, it give us more flexibility and gave us a combat unit. Two ships could work together. And we found it very effective. I was glad to hear you say that Frank Lawlor was here. We were comrades in arms, so to speak, over in China. And might be interesting to know that the squadron, which I later commanded after Newkirk [John Newkirk] was killed, was all Navy. All of our pilots were Navy-trained. And I believe that the second squadron, known as the Panda Bear Squadron, had one of the finest records in—

EAV: Yes, sir. We know that well.

DLH: And I think it's due to the fine training that we had here at Pensacola.

[Missions in China]

EAV: Well, Colonel, can you recall for us one of the most memorable days in your career, either in AVGs or later, combat-wise?

DLH: Well, Henry, there were many instances. I don't know of any one particular one. I was scared all the time.

EAV: Weren't we all, sir?

00:02:37

DLH: But I think the closest shave I had was on a head-on pass that a Jap made with me and—over the field at Hengyang. And I was fortunate in not having a head-on collision with him. The six 50s that we were carrying were heavy enough [that] the airplane was destroyed in this pass, and I maneuvered in time for the debris and everything to go past me.

But in flying in that country, it looks—looked like that there were always crises of some kind. In the early days, we had many, many combats in one day. The Japanese would come in with maybe anywhere from 50, 75, 80 fighter planes, and we would have maybe six to—I think the most we ever had in the air at one time was eight.

EAV: For goodness sake.

DLH: And naturally, there was a lot of opportunity to have many combats.

[Evaluating the Bell P-59 Airacomet and a Japanese "Zeke" fighter plane]

EAV: Well, Colonel, when you returned to the Armed Forces, did you have any other experiences that you might like to recall at this time? As I say, your name is certainly synonymous with any of the fighter aces, especially those Navy-trained. That's why we're so delighted to have you with us.

DLH: Well, Henry, when I came back to the States, I was assigned to the 412th Fighter Group, which was our first jet group. And I later commanded that group when Colonel Boushey [Homer A. Boushey] left, and we were equipped with a Bell 59, which was a twin-engine jet.

00:04:46

EAV: Yes, sir.

DLH: And it was interesting. We had a Zeke up there for evaluation purposes, and it was interesting to fly the Zeke against a 59 and a 59 against a Zeke. And of course, the 59 was not a combat weapon, but it was the beginning. And it had a very light wing loading, and surprising enough, people who fought the Japanese know them—knew the ability of the Japanese aircraft. And it was the Bell 59, actually, could turn inside of the Zeke. And—however, I had a sad experience flying a Zeke against the 59. I got inverted chasing it around, trying to get on its tail. And they have a float-type carburetor, and the engine cut out on me, and I wasn't able to start it. Fortunately, I was over the field and was able to make a dead-stick landing on the field.

So I thought to myself, "I'll never get in another Japanese airplane." [laughter] I was thinking, "Nothing worse than being killed in a Japanese plane."

EAV: Well, Colonel Tex Hill, I know we'll—we hope that Bob Prescott will be with us tonight and bring out a group. I understand Catfish Raine [Robert J. "Catfish" Raine], Bob Raine, who I went to school with in San Francisco, is looking forward to being with us. Frank Lawlor, of course. So until we get together this evening, may we thank you very much for this opportunity. Again, your name is certainly synonymous with modern-day tactics, as applied to World War II. And we thank you and the association certainly thanks you for being here this evening.

DLH: Well, thank you very much, Henry, for letting me be on your program.

EAV: Thank you, sir. Oh, I sure appreciate that.

00:06:54

[END OF INTERVIEW]