

"The Bloody Great Wheel"

HARRISON R. THYNG

Larry Davis
with
James R. Thyng

Harrison R. Thyng was a helluva pilot, one of only seven to become fighter aces in both WWII and Korea. More than that, this fighter pilot was a leader of men. Few officers have experienced the assumption of command as young as did Harry Thyng and consistently commanded most of the organizations to which he was assigned from First Lieutenant through the rank of Brigadier General. Of those magnificent seven, only Harrison Thyng became a general officer.

He was a native of New Hampshire where it is said, men are made from granite. Born in 1918, he grew up in Barnstead and Pittsfield before leaving to join the Army Air Corps (USAAC) in 1939. Twenty seven years later he returned to New Hampshire, a Brigadier General and veteran of many battles.

He had fought in Europe as Commander of the 309th Squadron, 3rd Fighter Group flying British Spitfires. He was credited with the USAAF's first encounter with a FW 190, on 8 November, 1942, near Shoreham, England. Shipped to North Africa, Harry Thyng led his squadron into Oran and shot down a Vichy French Dewoitine 520 fighter on that first mission. One hundred sixty one missions later, battle weary and wounded, this fighter was sent home. A full Colonel at age 26, Harry became commander of the 413th Fighter Group flying P-47Ns. He led the group across the Pacific to Ie Shima in June, 1945 flying 22 missions before the atomic bomb ended it all. But, his fighting days were not yet complete.

Next it was Korea; and he answered the call. He was assigned as Commander of the 4th Fighter Interceptor Wing, Kimp'o, Korea on 1 November, 1951. He inherited a unit outmanned and outgunned by 750 MiG-15s positioned on five air bases north of the Yalu River. With not enough equipment and parts to effectively counter the overwhelming odds, he jumped the chain of command and risked his career to make something happen.

In a December, 1951 secret message he penned, "Personal to Vandenberg (Air Force Chief of Staff) from Thyng. I can no longer be responsible for air superiority in northwest Korea!" His F-86 Sabres were so badly outnumbered, Thyng feared that in spite of a favorable kill ratio, he was losing the war. He had listened to his maintenance personnel and S/Sgt Fred Newman told him "Colonel, my crew chiefs are working 24 hours but we don't have the parts we need, we don't have the wing tanks, and if we had to put up a maximum effort tomorrow morning, we wouldn't be able to do it!"

S/Sgt Gordon Beem, and the Wing Adjutant, Maj John Ross, didn't believe the commander understood the consequences of the message he was sending. Beem asked the Colonel if he really wanted to send the message. Col. Thyng replied, "Yes, there are too many lives at stake not to." The Colonel then climbed into his

F-86 Sabre jet, -Pretty Mary and the Four Js", and flew to MiG Alley.

The problem began to be rectified within 96 hours. The new North American Tech Rep, Mr. Penney Bowen, arrived in Korea, bringing with him some \$26,000.00 worth of badly needed parts. The AOCP rate started to drop dramatically at Kimpo. By early 1952 the in-commission rate had risen to over 75%, and air superiority over MiG Alley was never again in doubt. Of course, Col. Thyng's career took a big hit from all his superiors for a short time.

Walter Boyne wrote of the incident, 'From Longstreet at Gettysburg to von Paulus at Stalingrad to Walker in Korea, history is replete with stories of brave military leaders who would risk their lives in combat on a daily basis but would not risk their careers bucking their own superiors. In a stunning gesture defying the established order, Thyng did both.'

Col. Harrison R. Thyng scored many more victories than the five that are credited to him by official sources. It is well known that he gave several of the victories to the wingmen that flew with him and kept him safe in the cold blue skies of MiG Alley. Wingmen never got any credit for their deeds. Thus after he had scored his 5th MiG, all further credits went to the pilots that watched his tail. Such was the leadership of Col. Harrison R. Thyng - "The Bloody Great Wheel" at Kimpo.

When Col. Thyng went home from Korea, he had good reason to feel good. On 29 September 1952, at Col. Thyng's going away dinner, General Glenn O. Barcus, commander of 5th Air Force, named him one of the greatest fighters of all time. He had put together the most formidable air superiority force of any nation at that time. He was an ace in two wars, but also a leader willing to take risks for the benefit of his men. Col. Harrison R. Thyng, the premier fighter wing commander of his era, has now been all but forgotten.

In concert with the Pittsfield Historical Society, his children - "The Four Js" are trying to ensure that their father is remembered. They are seeking the funds to erect a monument of granite for a New Hampshire patriot who must not be forgotten. Please consider supporting this tribute to a true American hero who gave to his country all that he had to give. For more information see Harry Thyng's website at:

www.pittsfield-nh.com/thyngmemorial.htm

Contributions are tax deductible; the Society is a 501 (c) (3) organization. Please send any amount you feel is appropriate to:

Harrison R. Thyng Memorial
Pittsfield Historical Societ, Inc
13 Elm Street, P.O. Box 173
Pittsfield, New Hampshire 0326

No portion of this article may be used or reprinted without permission from the President of the F-86 Sabre Pilots Association or the editor of *Sabre Jet Classics* magazine.

[Return to Classics Page](#)