



Bold Venture: The American Bombing of Japanese-Occupied Hong Kong, 1942–1945 by Steven K. Bailey.

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The China-Burma-India (CBI) theater of the Pacific War has always been a secondary consideration in American histories of the Second World War, despite its desperate campaigns fought under brutalizing conditions by colorful characters. In *Bold Venture*, English professor Steven Bailey (Central Michigan Univ.) seeks to fill a gap in the narrative of this obscure area of the conflict in Asia. Relying almost exclusively on post-action reports and postwar memoirs, he recounts the Allied aerial campaign over and around Hong Kong in 1942–45. The result is an uneven blend of intimately personal accounts by participants and highly technical discussions of equipment and ordnance.

Bailey, who has lived near Hong Kong and written about travel and tourism in the area,¹ begins his account of the aerial campaign around the city with the demise of the American Volunteer Group (AVG), better known as the “Flying Tigers,” and their transition into the regular American Army Air Forces as members of the China Air Task Force (CATF). Though most AVG pilots opted to retire or return to their original service branches, a core of pilots and their mercurial commander, Gen. Claire Chennault, remained with the new unit, based at the end of a treacherous supply chain that conveyed supplies over “the Hump” of the Himalayas. The CATF suffered from inferior or outdated equipment, too few men, and insufficient ordnance throughout the Pacific War.

Though the anecdotes and technical information Bailey relates are fascinating, he gives the impression that the CBI campaign was a low priority, fringe effort, despite the fact that Allied fighters and bombers wreaked havoc on Hong Kong’s port facilities and warehouses for three years. Bailey instead observes that the Japanese gave only slightly more priority to Hong Kong than did the Allies; CATF pilots failed to register significant results in part because the Japanese provided so few prime targets. (Bailey several times repeats the quip about the devastating impact of the bombing campaign on the fish in the waters surrounding Hong Kong.)

The author is certainly well versed in the designs, capabilities, and technical aspects of the aircraft flown by both CATF and Japanese (JAAF) forces and his book is replete with descriptions of the comparative strengths and weaknesses of various aircraft:

The Shōki differed substantially from the Ki-43 Hayabusa which had long been the mainstay of JAAF fighter units based in China. Though the Hayabusa could outmaneuver the Shōki, the faster Ki-44 could hit 375 miles per hour in level flight and dive at an even higher speed. One brave pilot even pushed his Shōki into a 528-mile-per-hour power dive. The Shōki also packed twice the punch of a Hayabusa, as it carried four HO-103 heavy machine guns with 250 rounds apiece. In many re-

1. *Exploring Hong Kong: A Visitor's Guide to Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, and the New Territories* (San Francisco: Things Asian Pr, 2009).

spects the Ki-44 actually had more in common with its principle [*sic*] adversaries in China, the P-40 and the P-51. (117)

Juxtaposed to such mind-numbing technical descriptions of airplanes and armaments are dramatic personal accounts of the thrills and terrors of air raids and, most poignantly, the experiences of downed pilots and POWs.

On most evenings, however, uniformed officers whom he presumed to be Kempeitai asked him a series of questions that began with his early childhood and ended with his final mission over Hong Kong, then doubled back in an attempt to catch him in a lie. Each time he had to answer a question, (Sgt. James N.) Young found himself scrambling to remember how he had answered it the last time he was asked the same question. No matter how he responded, he almost always received a beating. Sometimes his questioners found his answers entirely inadequate and resorted to the tea-kettle or some other engine of torture. (85)

Readers will dislike Bailey's penchant for wordiness, jargon, and colloquialisms. Nicknames of arms and aircraft are interspersed throughout the work in an apparent effort to avoid constantly referring to aircraft by their technical designations. The book is equipped with a helpful (and long) list of acronyms and abbreviations, but provides no comparable list of local Hong Kong designations.

The book's great weaknesses are its overreliance on personal memoirs and failure to set CATF operations in their broader context. Though American air operations in southeastern China are his chief focus, the author omits to cite many high-quality popular treatments² or scholarly investigations³ of his subject. Finally, *Bold Venture* is a distinctly *American* history of its subject; there is little discussion of any aspect of Japanese strategy or tactics beyond technical analyses of aircraft, and none whatsoever of Chinese operations.

Steven Bailey has written an engaging but limited book that assumes a readership with substantial background knowledge of the Pacific War. In short, he has filled a lacuna in the story of the Pacific War with, at best, a supplementary work.

2. E.g., Barbara W. Tuchman's Pulitzer prize-winning *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911-45* (NY: Macmillan, 1971).

3. E.g., Eric M Bergerud, *Fire in the Sky: The Air War in the South Pacific* (NY: Basic Books, 1999).