

A Celebration of Life
John Richard Rossi
April 19, 1915 - April 17, 2008

John Richard Rossi was born in Placerville, California, schooled in San Francisco, and attended the University of California at Berkeley. He enlisted in the Navy in the fall of 1939 and was selected for flight training. Upon receiving his wings and commission in 1940, he was assigned as a Flight Instructor at Pensacola, Florida.

“Dick” Rossi resigned his Navy commission in 1941 to join the American Volunteer Group (AVG) under the command of Colonel Claire Chennault. He arrived in Rangoon on November 12, 1941 and was undergoing a training program in the P-40 aircraft at Toungoo, Burma when Pearl Harbor was attacked.

Dick Rossi engaged in his first combat over Burma in January 1942 (the second time he fired the guns in the P-40 he was in combat) and flew his last over the East China front in July 1942. Most of his combat missions were over Rangoon. Dick was a member of the AVG's First Pursuit Squadron (Adam and Eve). He also did detached combat duty with the Second and Third Squadrons, serving under all the AVG squadron commanders. He attained Ace status with a confirmed 6-1/4 victories in air-to-air combat.

When the AVG, better known as the “Flying Tiger,” was disbanded in 1942, Dick joined the China National Aviation Corporation (CNAC) flying supplies from India to China. By the time that was over he had flown a record 735 trips across “The Hump.” After working for CNAC for three years, Dick went to work for Claire Chennault's new airline, CAT where he was hired on as Chief Pilot. After the war, Dick, a founder of the Flying Tiger Line freight carrier, returned to California where he flew as a captain for 25 years, logging a lifetime of over 25,000 flying hours. He served as president of the AVG Flying Tigers association for sixty years and is a member of the American Fighter Aces Association and the Distinguished Flying Cross Society. Dick was also a founder of a chain of restaurants that were popular from 1960 to the 1980s, the “Hungry Tiger.”

The Chinese government awarded Dick the White Cloud Banner Grade V, China Air Force Wings (5 Stars) and the China War Memorial Decoration. He has also been awarded two Distinguished Flying Crosses, the Air Medal, two Presidential Unit Citations, a World War II Victory Medal, the Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal with four bronze stars for the India-Burma, Central Burma, China Defensive and China Offensive campaigns, and the Honorable Service Lapel Button. In 1969 he was given a Commendation from the USAF for sustained aerial support of combat operations in South Vietnam. The AVG was inducted into the Commemorative Air Force Hall of Fame in 1998, in Midland, Texas. In 1999 Dick was awarded the status of “Eagle” by the International Association of Eagles, Maxwell AFB, Alabama. The AVG was inducted into the National Aviation Hall of Fame in Dayton, Ohio, in July 1999. In 2007, the Fallbrook VFW Post 1924 selected Dick as their Veterans Day Honoree.

Dick and his wife, Lydia, enjoyed traveling the world and in the last ten years they visited China seven times. The last time they went to China, Dick was seated next to the President of China Hu Jintao, who toasted him and thanked him for what the Flying Tigers and other American Veterans had done for the Chinese people. Dick and his wife attended numerous air shows with the other members of the Flying Tigers. He loved being with his family and he looked forward to his annual trip to the High Sierras with son Tony, which they had taken for 23 years. In his last days Dick was talking about getting well enough to go again this year. He enjoyed telling stories and jokes, going to reunions of the many groups he belonged to and catching up with his old friends.

He was one of the finest of the greatest generation.