



Forgotten Aviator: The Adventures of Royal Leonard

Barry S. Martin

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OUT OR WAR-TORN SKIES, A LEGENDARY PILOT IS BORN Royal Leonard (1905-1962) flew in and out of aviation history - just on the edge of fame. His exploits mirror important developments in the Golden Age of American Aviation (1925-1941) and the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). "If Royal's story were told in a novel," says long-time China pilot and author Felix Smith, "nobody would believe it all could have happened to one man." Royal learned his craft at the West Point of the Air in San Antonio, Texas. As a Western Air Express night mail pilot, he pioneered blind flying along the treacherous Rocky Mountains. As a TWA pilot, he introduced celestial navigation. An early Airline Pilots Association (ALPA) officer, he fought for mail plane safety at the cost of his job. He flew the Lockheed Orion in which Wiley Post and Will Rogers later crashed and attributed their fatal accident to a surprising cause. During the 1930s, a handful of elite pilots were racers. Jackie Cochran selected Royal as a copilot for the MacRobertson Race of the Century between England and Australia. Royal also competed in the Bendix Death Race in a Gee Bee Widow Maker. Before World War II, Royal worked for the Chinese warlord known as the Young Marshal who kidnapped Nationalist dictator Chiang Kai-shek and changed the course of Chinese history. Royal provided Communist political commissar Chou En-lai his first plane ride and later served as Chiang Kai-shek's personal pilot. During the war, Royal's roles were unique. Claire Chennault chose him to command the Flying Tigers Bomber Group. Royal briefed Colonel Jimmy Doolittle on Chinese landing fields for the Tokyo Raid. Royal, Chennault and Madame Chiang Kai-shek planned their own Tokyo bombing raid. Royal survived flying the Skyway to Hell over the Hump for China National Aviation Corporation. No wonder after a perilous flight war correspondent Martha Gellhorn described Royal as her "hero." Author's Biography The author has spent twenty years uncovering a rich trove of private documentary sources about the Forgotten Aviator. Martin is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the College of William and Mary and has an M.A. in history from the University of Washington and a J.D. from the University of California - Berkeley. He is a retired Administrative Law Judge and resides in Sacramento, California with his wife, Carolyn.

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