

George Victor Choffy Masselos

George Masselos was a Master Sergeant and mechanic in the U.S. Air Force during World War II, serving as line chief in the Flying Tigers. This select group of fighters was charged with protecting China against Japanese forces. The shark-



George Masselos atop his Flying Tiger plane during World War II.

headed nose art of the Flying Tigers remains among the most recognizable image of any individual combat aircraft or combat unit of World War II. Masselos served as leader in the Third Fighter Group, 14th Air Force, Chinese American Composite Wing, under General Claire Lee Chennault. He was awarded the Medal of Honor.



George V. Masselos

Masselos often spoke of his experiences in China. He commanded a group of both American and Chinese mechanics and fighters, conducting rescue and reconnaissance missions, helping Chinese men, women and children escape often at night. Tools and parts were scarce. They rigged parts and fixed broken wings with wire, string and found objects. Food was even more scarce. The Flying Tigers subsisted on fish heads and rice when they were lucky. George learned to speak Chinese during his tour of duty so that he could command his group effectively. He was once struck in the neck by a fighter pilot's propeller. And one crash into a stone quarry left him with lifelong breathing problems from silica.



The Flying Tigers, pictured at the start of World War II. General Chennault is center front. Masselos is in the first row, third from the left.

Born November 23, 1919, in New York, N.Y. to the late Spyros and Mildred (Choffy) Masselos, George was an orphan by the time he was four. His father died of a heart attack, and his mother succumbed to tuberculosis. George was raised by his grandmother and his mother's sister in Teaneck, NJ. He had no siblings.



George at 10 months with his mother in New York City, 1920.



George's parents, Spyros and Mildred Masselos, 1917.

George was so influenced by his experiences during World War II, particularly in being responsible for so many people. He felt it made him who he was throughout his life. His patriotism and love of this country never wavered.

After the war, George attended Bergen Community College, but he found the adjustment to civilian life difficult. His grades suffered. He turned to retail, which he did most of the rest of his life. George specialized in American and Asian fine arts and antiques. His

knowledge was broad and his eye excellent. He dealt in only the finest pieces. According to Ron Dickerson, "George could sit here and watch 'Antiques Roadshow' until he died," Dickerson said, "and he always knew the prices before (the appraiser) did." George made several donations to various museums, including a collection of clothing from the early 1800's to The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

George lived in New York for a while, then moved to Somerset County, New Jersey, Belle Mead and then South Dennis. He purchased and painstakingly restored a victorian and two colonial homes. He has been awarded by the New Jersey Historical Society for his work on the Christopher Ludlum House.

George always sounded gruff and tough. But he was the gentlest, kindest soul. We often teased him that he was crusty on the outside and total mush on the inside.



George with his first wife Grace Ziebarth in Belle Mead, NJ.

George was preceded in death by his first wife, Grace Ziebarth in 1976. Grace was a professional ballet dancer and teacher who taught upstairs in an old firehouse in Teaneck. George's antique store, Firehouse Antiques, was on the first floor. Grace was a young woman when she died of cancer.

George married his second wife, Lenore Rosselot, in 1993. Lenore, a world traveler and personal friend of the Dali Lama, passed in 1992. She had a heart attack and died while talking on the phone with George. Lenore was an amazing friend to me as well, like a second mother.



Lenore and George on their wedding day.

George was survived by his life partner and companion, Ron Dickerson. Ron moved in to

care for George and help take care of his home and property. But then in 2000, Ron was diagnosed with MS, and George rose to the occasion to care for Ron. It gave George a purpose in life, a reason to continue giving and caring. The two men depended on each other. George left his home to Ron and established a trust to care for Ron for the rest of his life.

George never had children of his own, but he adopted people. He was a collector and nurturer of friends. He was a giving, loving, kind soul who gave freely of his time and energy and resources. He had a way of making everyone feel special. He was my best friend. My children called him Grandpa George.

George passed away in February 28th, 2011 at the age of 91. He died of pulmonary fibrosis, caused by his exposure to silicas during World War II. I was holding his hand when he breathed his last. He was laid to rest in the Unionville Cemetery, Dutchtown Zion Road in Belle Mead, NJ on March 4th at 11 am with a full military service. The American flag that had draped his casket was folded and given to Ron Dickerson.

George's great spirit lives on in the hearts of those many people who loved him.

According to his sister-in-law of thirty years, Kathy Slack of Roanoke, Virginia, "George was a friend and a 'one of a kind' family member. For his gruff and playful telephone 'Hello,' his wonderful 'spaghetti gravy,' his generosity, his love



George and Ron on a trip to Washington, D.C., where George donated many of his Flying Tiger memorabilia to the Smithsonian Institution.



George Masselos at 85, surrounded by his collection of antiques, at his home in South Dennis, NJ.

for antiques, art, history, flowers, gardens, and all living things, he is missed.” She continued, “Being with George was always educational and entertaining!”

Ron Dickerson says George was the most influential person in his life. “I miss our 8 pm movie times and telling you if your clothes matched for the day, the way you cleaned out the fridge and made soup that somehow, was always delicious. You will always be in my heart.”

It was an honor to have known and loved him. I miss him. And he will always be in my heart as well.

Written and submitted by Jill Turndorf, Skillman, NJ.

A star has been incised in George Masselos’s loving memory in the American Legion Centennial Memorial, Clarksville Road, West Windsor, NJ.



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RELEASE--UPON RECEIPT

THIS IS THE WAY IT WORKS, CAPTAIN.

AN ADVANCED AIR BASE, CHINA--Master Sergeant George V. Masselos, line chief of the "Exterminator" squadron of the Fourteenth Air Force's Chinese-American Composite Wing, explains the intricacies of an electrical relay to Capt K.F. Wang, Chinese vice-commander of the fighter squadron. The squadron, like all units of the Chinese-American Wing, has both Chinese and American personnel. Sgt Masselos, whose grandmother, Mrs. Mary Choffy, resides at 564 Wyndham Rd., Teaneck, N.J., has been overseas since July, 1943. He is a graduate of Teaneck High School, attended New York Business College two years and was employed by the advertising firm of Vanderbilt-Jackson Inc., when he entered the army in January, 1942. CLEARED- *Whitten* U.S.FORCES, CHINA THEATER.

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