



VINCENT

Casey and the Pirates

It existed for only three years, far back in the 1950s, but many still remember Vincent Air Force Base, outside Yuma, Ariz. One reason: the name stirs memories of one of the more colorful and daring officers ever to enter the Air Force.

Clinton D. "Casey" Vincent was Gen. Claire L. Chennault's top fighter commander in China, a P-40 ace, and a general officer at age 29. Milton Caniff, the famed syndicated cartoonist, drew his character in two popular comic strips. He was the stuff of Air Force legend.

Vincent was born in 1914 in Gail, Texas, a tiny windswept town on the High Plains. Casey—no one called him Clinton—was the youngest of 10 children. The Vincents moved on to Natchez, Miss., where Casey grew up and excelled in school.

The star student entered West Point on July 1, 1932. That class produced 48 generals—among them Benjamin O. Davis Jr. and Creighton W. Abrams Jr. Upon graduating in June 1936, second lieutenant Vincent instantly transferred into the Air Corps.

Vincent completed primary flight training and advanced attack training in Texas. By December 1941, he was a major and commanded the 35th Pursuit Group in California.

Then came Pearl Harbor and the Pacific War.

Vincent spent a year in India, but he itched for combat. In late 1942, he joined the China Air Task Force, formerly the "Flying Tigers," run by Chennault. By August 1943, Vincent was a P-40 ace with six victories and was a member of "the Zero Club"—composed of five US pilots who had flown captured Japanese Zero fighters.

His China exploits got Caniff to drawing Vincent as the fictionalized "Col. Vince Casey" in his *Terry and the Pirates* strip. It ran throughout World War II. (Later, Vincent appeared as "Brig. Gen. P. G. 'Shanty' Town" in Caniff's postwar strip *Steve Canyon*.)

In December 1943, the Army Air Forces formed the 68th Composite Wing in China. Chennault put Vincent in charge. He devised bold offensive tactics that stunned Japanese forces. In June 1944, at 29, Vincent reached temporary rank of brigadier general—the second youngest airman to receive a star. He was eight years out of West Point.

Vincent's tour ended in late 1944. He returned to the US, reverted in 1946 to his permanent grade of major, and began another rise in the ranks. He regained the grade of brigadier general in 1951.

July 5, 1955, was Vincent's first full day as deputy chief of staff for operations at Continental Air Defense Command. He went home that night, fell asleep, and suffered a fatal heart attack. He was 40.

On Sept. 1, 1956, USAF bestowed Vincent's name upon Yuma AFB, Ariz. Vincent Air Force Base was the main flying training base for Air Defense Command's F-86 and F-89 interceptor crews and some B-26 drone carriers. USAF closed Vincent in 1959, transferring ownership to the Navy. It soon became Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, which today is USMC's busiest aviation site.

The airfield itself, however, is still "Vincent Field."

1/ Clinton "Casey" Vincent with an F-89 in the early 1950s. 2/ Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, which was formerly Vincent AFB, Ariz. 3/ Brig. Gen. Vincent receives an Oak Leaf Cluster for his Air Medal from Maj. Gen. Claire Chennault.

CLINTON DERMOTT VINCENT

Nickname: Casey
Born: Nov. 29, 1914, Gail, Texas
Died: July 5, 1955, Colorado Springs, Colo.
College: US Military Academy
Occupation: US military officer
Services: Army Air Corps (1936-41); Army Air Forces (1941-47); US Air Force (1947-55)
Main Era: World War II
Years Active: 1936-1955
Combat: China-Burma-India Theater
Final Grade: Brigadier General
Honors: Distinguished Service Medal, Purple Heart, Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross (3) Air Medal (4)
Famous Friends: Claire Chennault, Milton Caniff, John Alison, Tex Hill
Buried: Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery, Texas

VINCENT AIR FORCE BASE

State: Arizona
Nearest City: Yuma
Area of Main Base: 4.7 Sq mi./approx 3,000 acres
Status: Closed
Opened (by Army as Fly Field): 1928
Renamed Yuma Army Airfield: Dec. 15, 1942
Inactivated: Nov. 1, 1945
Renamed Yuma AFB: Aug 24, 1954
Renamed Vincent AFB: Sept. 1, 1956
Closed (by USAF): June 15, 1959
Reopened by Navy/USMC: June 15, 1959
Renamed MCAS Yuma: July 20, 1962
Current Owner: USMC
Former Owners: US Army (Eighth Corps, 1928-32, Third Army, 1932-42, Flying Training Command, 1942-45, US Air Force—Air Defense Command, 1951-59)