

“Excerpt from *Flying Tiger Memories: Chapter 2*”



Bob Prescott And Hollywood

Captain John F. Dickson, President, Flying Tiger Line Pilots Association

Bob Prescott had attended college in Southern California before entering the Navy. He was well aware of the hold Hollywood had on the American public. When he founded National Skyway Freight Corporation, and throughout his life-long position as the president of The Flying Tiger Line, Bob Prescott had a special regard for and developed special relationships with those involved in the Hollywood film industry.

In June of 1945, with a sense of showmanship and intent to hit the deck running, he chose the luxurious Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles as the fledgling airline's first employment office. (On the practical side, flight operations were set up at the Long Beach Municipal Airport.) The hotel had served as a military rest and recreation facility during World War II, with the entire second floor set up with cots for military personnel on leave.

At that time, downtown Los Angeles was a bustling American city and the hotel had been an early venue for the Oscar awards' ceremonies at the Biltmore Bowl, the hotel's auditorium. The Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences was created in its Crystal Ballroom in 1927. From 1945 to 1949, in a post-war boom for the film industry, Hollywood had experienced the most stable and lucrative years in its history. In 1946, when two-thirds of the American population went to the movies at least once a week and the studios earned record-breaking profits, Bob Prescott was busy creating a whole new industry of his own – airfreight.

During the war there were many films made about American air power used to defeat Germany and Japan. One in particular, *Flying Tigers* starring John Wayne, dramatized the exploits of the famed American Volunteer Group (AVG, the official name of the Flying Tigers) of which Prescott and his fellow pilot/investors were a part.



Flying Tigers movie poster

Republic Pictures

The country welcomed the returning flyboys, as they were called then, with open arms as true American heroes. The pilots of National Skyway Freight were constantly referred to as “those Flying Tiger guys” so in 1947 Prescott changed the name of the company to The Flying Tiger Line to take advantage of their fame and to set them apart from the many other GI start-ups. Although always the modest soft-spoken boy from Texas, Prescott sensed the value of this goodwill directed towards him and his fellow AVG buddies. He used this to advantage when schmoozing with the Hollywood elite – networking, as we call it today – in its purest form.

Prescott's affinity for the Hollywood elite was affirmed by the many beautiful movie actresses and actors he was photographed with. There are many archived public relations prints of Prescott and various celebrities such as Bob Burns (the “Arkansas Traveler”



*Camille Joseph Rosbert with Marilyn Maxwell at Long Beach in 1946
photo Flying Tigers Club Archives*



*Bob Burns and Helen Ruth Prescott
photo Jack Birns / Flying Tigers Club Archives*



*Bob Hope in 1946 promoting his Capitol Records album 'I Never Left Home' with four women on the tarmac in front of a Flying Tigers C-47 cargo aircraft. Hope was on a promotional tour for Capitol Records
photo Flying Tiger Line Pilots Association Archives*



Bob Prescott helps the star pass out pledge cards to (left to right) John Stowell, looking over Prescott's shoulder; "Rod" Rodriguez; Manny Bernal; Frank Simpkins; John Kuncewitch; Harley Chambers and Tony Kovacs, looking over Miss Jayne Mansfield's shoulder. Burbank Tigers spearhead their area Chest drive for 1960
photo The 6 Watson Bros / Flying Tigers Club Archives

who played an instrument that he called the "Bazooka" which is where the military rocket launcher got its name), Marilyn Maxwell, Jayne Mansfield, Susan Hayward, Bob Hope and Art Linkletter, to name a few. Over the ensuing years many were invited as special guests to annual reunions for the AVG. Bob's second wife, Anne-Marie Bennstrom (1930-2018), was a Swedish health guru to the stars with one of her spas, the Sanctuary on Hollywood Boulevard, across from Grauman's Chinese Theatre. Howard Hughes mixed Hollywood and aviation, and Bob took note.

As the airline was gaining success and notoriety, Palm Springs had become Hollywood's desert playground for celebrities to relax and escape from the hustle and bustle of showbiz. The legendary 'two-hour rule' of Hollywood studios put Palm Springs on the map as a perfect getaway. Actors under contract had to be within two hours of the studio in case they were needed for last minute filming or photo shoots. Famous celebrities eventually built hideaway Palm Springs homes and golf courses, and called the desert home.

Much of America's business is conducted on the golf course and in the 19th hole (to be clear, a golf course only has 18 holes; the 19th is the clubhouse). Prescott wasted no time remaining in close proximity to the friendships and contacts that he had developed by purchasing a home and opening a branch of his Hungry Tiger restaurant chain in Palm Springs.

Of the many relationships that developed over the years, one celebrity in particular became a close friend. Radio and television personality Art Linkletter can be seen in many photos and early movies with Bob. Linkletter remained a close friend and confidant to the very end and was one of many who attended his memorial services in 1978. The church was packed with Hollywood, military, and business celebrities, including Bob Hope, Jimmy Doolittle and the heads of every major aerospace company. The packed church was a testament to how highly respected and loved Bob Prescott had become.



Susan Hayward supporting a Korean Gift Lift flight
photo Flying Tigers Club Archives

This is an excerpt from "*Flying Tiger Memories*," published 2019 and approved for inclusion on this website by Astral Horizon Aviation Press.

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