



Michael J Hitchko MD 1913-2007

Mike was born November 10, 1913 in Pottstown, Pennsylvania. His parents had recently emigrated from the area of Eastern Europe which would become Czechoslovakia in 1919. He attended undergraduate school at Carroll College in Cleveland, Ohio, and graduated from Loyola University School of Medicine, Chicago, in 1941. His internship at the U S Army's Letterman General Hospital in San Francisco was a much more rewarding venture than a civilian internship: Cook County Hospital, in Chicago, was paying interns \$10.00 per month, plus board, room, and laundry.

Enter fair maid: Marion, who, having completed her nurses training, had also joined the army and was stationed at Letterman. Love at first sight? Well, almost: they were married late in his internship year.

Because of army regulations, Marion had to resign her commission.

Mike was then sent to the Medical Field Service School at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania for medical and dental officer's basic training ; which included close-order drill (formation marching). There was a parallel program at Carlisle Barracks for enlisted men, who were then commissioned in the Medical Administrative Corps. (I later earned my M.A.C. Commission there). Mike decided to transfer from the Regular Army to the Army Air Corps, and soon after was sent to Southern China by way of India and Burma. His Commanding Officer was General Chennault, who had been the air advisor to Chiang-Kai-Shek, and who had also formed the American Volunteer Group known as the "Flying Tigers." The Chinese and American troops were under the command of Chiang-Kai-Shek and General "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell: neither could abide the other. Chiang-Kai-Shek later had Stilwell relieved of his command. Later, Stilwell, in his writings, referred to Chiang-Kai-Shek as "the peanut." Flying equipment and supplies from airstrips in Burma into Southern China, and wounded and sick soldiers out, was extremely hazardous with the C-47 (the military version of the DC-3) aircraft used: The operating ceiling of the planes was lower than the mountain peaks! Later, the "Burma Road" carried most of this traffic.

After the war, Mike returned to Letterman Hospital to begin his orthopedic residency. During his rotation at Shriner's Hospital he met his future partner, Paul Grigorieff, an orthopedic resident at the University of California in San Francisco. Along came the Korean Conflict: Mike was assigned to a MASH (Mobile Army Surgical Hospital) and following that was stationed in Puerto Rico, where he decided his Army Life was over.

Mike joined Paul Grigorieff in practice in Eureka in 1954. Their office was in the old Medical Arts Building at 6th and G Streets, and their phone number was Hillside 2 1105 (Arcata was Van Dyke 2, and Fortuna was Randolph 5). They built a new office on Harrison Avenue at the corner of St. Joseph drive, and later were joined by Kenneth Roberts, Ed Emmons, and Robert Sampson. Mike retired in 1981.

I was associated with Mike for many years, initially having an office across the hall. I found him to be a genuinely kind man. He was completely apolitical, gracious, and collegial. He loved to fish, especially on the Smith River, where he had a cabin at one time. He and Marion's homestead in Freshwater was his pride and joy: Marion, who remains completely independent, lives there. He is also survived by his six children: daughters Barbara, of Eureka, and Cathie, of Maui; and sons Michael, of Chico, Kieth, of Grant's Pass, Bruce, of Calistoga, and Greg, of Eureka.

by Ted Welton MD

(Editors Note: Mike and I were both army medics who took care of aviators: he in WWII, I in Viet Nam.

He had a number of "war stories" about flying through the mountain passes in Burma, which was called "flying the hump". The airplanes were unable to fly over the mountains, so the pilots had to weave through the valleys between. Weather forecasting varied between primitive and nonexistent and radio beacons were primitive and unreliable. There were many fatal crashes. Mike could have stayed in his clinic on the ground but...being Mike...he opted to ride along on some of the missions to have a better idea of the conditions and stresses his patients were facing. He was always quietly dismissive about it and felt it was just part of the job, nothing special.

We young docs sometimes feel we've outstripped the old timers. In many ways, we have: we're smarter about prions, MRSA and such, and we are comfortable with InformationTechnology. But for humility, guts and compassion, few of us will ever match Mike Hitchko.

by George Ingraham, M.D.