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# Booked for Travel

*Edited by Horace Sutton*

## The Nine Lives of CAT—2

ONE OF THE MOST COLORFUL, romantic, and often mysterious of the world's airlines is CAT, the Taipei-based company which grew out of the wartime network operated with great dash by the late Gen. Claire Chennault. In its twenty-two-year history it amassed an unbelievable string of adventures as well as a reputation for operating the most glittering flying machine in the Asian skies.

When CAT's famed Mandarin Jet, a Boeing 727, crashed outside Taipei last February, its surviving American pilots were ordered to stand trial for negligence and malfeasance of duties. It was an unprecedented move in airline circles, and marked the end of CAT's international operations for which it was celebrated in the Far East. CAT's place will be taken by China Airlines, a Chinese-owned and government-blessed company formed by a group of retired Air Force officers. Although the plans and hopes of China Airlines are ambitious, the memory of CAT from its earliest days under Chennault to its famed Mandarin Jet will linger among those travelers who fly the ports of the Far East.

Under Chennault's never-to-be-hidden-under-the-bushel leadership, the origin and the early days of CAT operations on the mainland leave few questions. But CAT and the complex of which it is the smallest, but most public, part have mystified and confused

many today. There are many who see the spoon-stirrers of the Central Intelligence Agency in the pot. CAT certainly has strong connections with the U.S. Government, but so does every airline with headquarters in the United States. This is the game of "corporateness," connected no doubt with taxation and profit, in which entities are set up with the flick of a lawyer's pen.

At the top of CAT's pyramid is the Pacific Corporation, a holding company incorporated in Delaware which in turn is the parent company of Air America, Inc., with headquarters in Washington, D.C., which in turn owns Air Asia Company, Ltd., one of the world's largest aircraft maintenance and repair facilities employing close to 8,000 employees at Tainan in southern Taiwan, which in turn holds a service contract with CAT, which is the way the Americans operate the "Chinese-owned" airline. There are other offshoots as well.

The chairman of the board of Air America is that old, lean tiger of the Pacific in World War II, Adm. Felix Stump (Ret.). The board includes such figures as Robert Goelet, of an old and wealthy Manhattan family. The complete organization is said to make \$10,000,000 a year. It's not a small grouping. With more than 11,000 employees, the outfit ("outfit" is the word used by most employees since there just isn't any other way to describe it) in terms of its nearly 200 operating aircraft—ranging from the tiny helio-courier to the 727—is one of the largest aircraft operators in the world.

The direction of the empire is centered in the iron hands of George A. Doole, Jr., a former Pan American pilot who pulls the strings from his office on Connecticut Avenue in Washington. His man in the field is Hugh L. Grundy, managing director of CAT, president of Air Asia, and a director of Air America. This tall, courtly, graying native of Springfield, Kentucky, works from a comparatively small office on the seventh floor of the Central Building on Taipei's main street, Chungshan Lu.

The bulk of the outfit's fleet operates in Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos under contract to U.S. Government agencies—usually the AID (Agency for International Development) mission, although Air America also carries out contract flying from Japan and for some time operated regularly scheduled flight

services within the Ryukyu Islands, services that now have been taken over by a subsidiary of Japan Air Lines. Air America's pilots haul just about anything anywhere, dropping rice and blankets and medicine to Meo tribesmen in the mountains of Laos or outposts in Vietnam and, so it is rumored, sometimes "hot rice"—weapons and ammunition.

The company is no Johnny-come-lately to the Southeast Asia area, having operated from Hanoi and other cities in the early 1950s. And in 1954, operating under a contract with the French Government, the outfit flew supply missions into Dienbienphu, where the company lost its greatest legend—the pilot known in flying circles everywhere as "Earthquake McGoon," a 300-pound giant of a man. Terrence McGovern was his real name, and he was from Jersey City, New Jersey. When he flew, they had to modify the seats in the cockpit; his food capacity was as legendary as his flying. When his C-119 Flying Boxcar went down, grown men cried. In 1949, he had been captured by the Communists in China. Only a few months later, he walked into Pop Gin-



gles's hangout in Hong Kong and announced: "They couldn't afford to feed me." It was always thought that Pop Gingles had arranged ransom for the great McGoon.

Thus the complex continues in the spirit and image of the original CAT. When General Chennault and his main partner, the late Whiting Willauer, who later became ambassador to several Central American countries, founded CAT, China no longer was a sleeping giant, but it was a crippled one.

Eight years of war that started at Marco Polo Bridge had left the nation's land, water, and air transport shattered. UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) supplies piled up on the docks of China's port cities; salable produce, cotton, tobacco, tungsten, and other commodities moldered in the interior. To alleviate this crisis, CAT was born.

The birth certificate, or founding document, was signed in the Broadway Mansions on Shanghai's Bund on October 25, 1946. Chennault, who directed the famed Flying Tigers before the United States got in the war and then the 14th Air Force after Pearl Harbor, had gone back to his native Louisiana for retirement and some catfishing. But China was in his bloodstream, and



there was good reason to believe he was in love with a beautiful, young newspaper reporter named Chen Hsiang-Mei, who later became his wife and wrote a touching account of the romance, *A Thousand Springs*, under the name of Anna Chennault. And so Chennault scratched around for capital and manpower to start the airline that would be known as CAT.

For capital he turned to many sources, including a number of Shanghai bankers and industrialists. One of them, Dr. Wang Wen-san, became chairman of the board of CAT. His personality is almost as colorful as the airline. Dr. Wang writes songs, plays, operettas (some in English); he is an authority on the Chinese dance and opera and he is an inventor. One of his inventions is a water filter for pipes and cigarette holders.

For manpower, Chennault hired a group of beardless young men fresh from the military, and many of them still fly for the organization. They were sent to bases in Hawaii and the Philippines to scrounge for surplus aircraft—C-46's and C-47's. The airline's first aircraft, a C-46 piloted by Paul Holden of Greenleaf, Kansas (who died of a heart attack last year), and Frank Hughes of Syracuse, New York, landed on December 18, 1946, at Canton's White Cloud airport, where elephants turned pink by airport dust presented constant landing hazards. By October 1947, the airline was operating eighteen cargo aircraft—fifteen C-46's and three C-47's. During its first eight months of operation the airline set a world's record of 2,921,212 ton-miles flown—hog bristles from Weih sien, cotton from Tsinan to Tsingtao that saved the jobs of 19,000 employees of the China Textile Corporation which was on the verge of a forced shutdown. Chennault and Willauer slashed air cargo rates by one-third and refused to carry anything that smacked of luxury items.

But the Reds were on the move, and CAT found that more and more it was carrying human rather than material cargo; whole orphanages were airlifted to safety, and a world's record evacuation of 7,000 persons was made from imperiled Mukden. Suddenly, CAT was in the passenger-carrying business whether it liked it or not. But it still carried cargo and laid the pattern for the Berlin Airlift by supplying a major city—Taiyuan, with a population of 2,500,000—completely by air for the first time in history. The Taiyuan airlift enabled tough, anti-Communist Marshal Yen Hsieh-shan to hold out for months against Mao's encircling forces.

But the end was in the making, and, after closing down more than thirty bases, CAT reluctantly departed the mainland on January 15, 1950. Much

of the company's equipment was transported on a purchased landing ship, the LST-118, which was navigated down the river from Shanghai by the "captain of the CAT Navy," pilot Felix Smith, who besides being a flier still holds his third-mate's license in the Merchant Marine. That LST, after the company settled restlessly on southern Taiwan, was to become one of the world's most unusual airline maintenance installations, a floating machine shop with, among other things, a 90-foot parachute-testing shaft right down the middle of the ship. So primitive were conditions on Taiwan at the time (there were only five motor vehicles operating on the entire island) that CAT had to set up its own schools, using the LST facilities to repair toasters and even a small printing press to print report cards for the school.

The future looked anything but bright. But on June 25, 1950, the Korean War broke out. CAT's airlift capability suddenly became as sought after as a beauty's hand, and during the first hazardous months of the Korean conflict CAT pilots hauled up to 30 per cent of all airlifted supplies landing in Korea. In this era, CAT was reorganized and CAT, Inc.—as differentiated from Civil Air Transport Company Limited (CATCL)—was formed. CAT, Inc., was later changed to Air America.

CAT started passenger services that before its demise covered 5,083 unduplicated route miles to seven countries in the Orient—Japan, Korea, Okinawa, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand, and the Philippines. On July 11, 1961, the first lady of China, Madame Chiang Kai-shek, inaugurated a gleaming new Convair 880 passenger liner and CAT became the first purely regional carrier in the Orient, and among the first regional carriers in the world, to operate purely jet service. The Mandarin Jet was more than a passenger plane. In a way it was a flying museum which displayed the rich traditions of the ancient Chinese culture. There were moon gates and lion knobs and travel panoply from the days of Confucius, Chinese characters wishing long life and blessings, and, of course, CAT's symbols—the five-toed dragon and the Phoenix.

Most of the 1,600 CAT employees will either be absorbed by other segments of the complex or retire. But the yeast has gone from the sometimes wild blue yonder. —ARNOLD DIBBLE.

*(This is the second of two articles.  
The first appeared last week.)*

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Arnold Dibble is the former public relations director of CAT. He now is on the staff of United Press International in Tokyo.