

## **PART I**

**CAT Historical Milestones**

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**Covert Operations**

**Commercial Operations**

# CAT Historical Milestones

*From CAT Association website <https://www.catassociation.org>*

- **August 1945** – ends.
- **September 1945** – Whiting Willauer represents the Corcoran brothers' interest in establishing an airline in China, Rio Cathay-S.A. He merges the interest with Chennault who was working with Governor Kung Yun to establish a commercial airline to rebuild war-torn China.
- **October 25, 1946** – Chennault and Willauer sign an agreement to form Civil Air Transport (CAT). United Nations Relief & Rehabilitation Administration would allocate 2 million dollars to purchase aircraft and equipment. CAT would operate primarily to carry rehabilitation supplies for hospitals, agriculture, and public services from coastal ports to the interior of China. CAT could sell unused space to the general public at current competitive rates.
- **January 1947** – General George C. Marshall's mission ends. He reports the failure to reconcile Nationalists and Communists and recommends limited aid to Chiang Kai-Shek. The Truman Administration was divided as to whom to support in China.
- **January 27, 1947** – The First C-47 lands in Shanghai from Clark Field, Manila, piloted by Lew Burridge and Var Green, followed by three more C-47s piloted by Stu Dew, Paul Holden, Weldon Bigony, Bill Hobbs, Harry Cockrell, and Frank Hughes.
- **March 1947** – First C-46s arrive in Shanghai with Dick Rossi, Joe Rosbert, and Bob Conrath as Captains.
- **March 22, 1947** – CAT begins Operation “Bo Peep”. Cotton is flown by CAT from the interior to Tsingtao, North China’s largest port, and Tientsin to keep factories open in isolated interior cities.
- **April 1947** – The CAT contract was amended to allow airlifts of other Chinese government and relief agency cargoes beyond the United Nations contract. This amendment probably saved CAT financially and drew CAT more directly into the Chinese Civil War.
- **May and June 1947** – With contracts with the Chinese Post Office and other governmental agencies, only 40% of CAT’s cargo is now UNNRA.
- **July 1947** – The CIA was established under the National Security Act.
- **July 1947** – CAT air operations credited with saving millions of flood refugees in Kwangtung Province.

- **July to December 1947** – CAT grew as a commercial cargo airline hauling raw materials from the interior of China to the coast and needed medical supplies in the opposite direction under increasingly hostile conditions in the communist-held countryside.
- **1948** – marks the change from a relief cargo airline into a contract airline with the Chinese Nationalist government. Still flying medical supplies, cows, sheep, silkworm eggs, and other exotic cargo, CAT begins transporting soldiers and refugees out of besieged Nationalist-controlled cities.
- **January 1948** – CAT carries supplies into the Communist-surrounded city of Mukden. Over a period of five months flies out 4,500 wounded soldiers and 22,000 refugees.
- **March 1948** – CAT flies to the rescue of CAT employees out of Communist-surrounded Linfen. Communist reports describe a CAT bomber flew low level runs scattering their troops.
- **April 1948** – Weishien is surrounded by Communist forces trapping CAT employees. CAT aircraft, with no military weaponry, dropped flares and whistling empty beer bottles scattering the Communist forces and allowing the rescue of besieged employees.
- **1948** – As each Nationalist city falls to the Communists, debate rages in the United States as to what to do in China.
- **July 29, 1948** – CAT suffered its first fatalities in the Chinese Civil War.
- **November 1948** – Manchuria, the industrial heart of China falls to the Communists. Chiang Kai Shek chooses Hsuehchow near Nanking, to fight a set-piece battle to defeat Mao's forces. CAT flies in supplies and ammunition and evacuates wounded soldiers.
- **January 11, 1949** – Hsuehchow falls to Communists.
- **January 21, 1949** – Chiang Kai Shek relinquished office of Presidency and moved key personnel and treasury to Taiwan by CAT transport, signaling the end of Nationalist rule of Mainland China.
- **April 1949** – As the Berlin Airlift is at its height, CAT wages an equally heroic defense of Taiyuan, but is unable to save the city.
- **May 1949** – Chennault testifies before the Senate Committee that the U.S. should help save China from Communist takeover. Chennault has first meetings with CIA officials about utilizing CAT to help save China.
- **August 5, 1949** – U.S. Government issues White Paper on China stirring up controversy between those who want to abandon China and those who want to aid China.
- **September 20, 1949** – The State Department gives tentative approval to the CIA for covert aid to finance CAT.

- **September 28, 1949** – \$75 million was approved for the “general area” of China. At the same time, Al Cox is sent by the CIA to run covert operations in China. His cover is Special Assistant to the President, Chennault.
- **October 1, 1949** – Mao proclaims the People's Republic of China.
- **October 10, 1949** – CAT begins contract work to fly for the CIA.
- **November 10, 1949** – CAT prevents possible Communist takeover of Taiwan by Red Paratroopers. Chennault and Willauer signed a promissory note to purchase 71 aircraft belonging to CNAC and CATC, whose Board of Directors had defected to Beijing.
- **November 30, 1949** – Communists invade Yunnan. Scattered remnants of the KMT army fled across the border into Burma and Thailand.
- **January 1950** – After extensive losses in the Chinese Civil War and the loss of the mainland, CAT faces bankruptcy.
- **January 16, 1950** – CAT pilot Bob Buol was captured by Communists in Yunnan Province and held prisoner until 1955.
- **March 13, 1950** – The Department of State, Department of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff give CIA approval to buy an interest in CAT with an option to buy full control.
- **April 20, 1950** – CAT inaugurates weekly round trip service to Singapore, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Taipei, and Tokyo.
- **May 29, 1950** – Dean Rusk's memorandum and testimony to the House Foreign Affairs Committee on Taiwan reveals that covert action in support of resistance on Formosa is justified.
- **June 25, 1950** – North Korea invades South Korea. This was to have major consequences for the KMT Army in Burma, U.S. foreign policy in SE Asia, and CAT's eventual involvement.
- Truman orders the Seventh Fleet into the Straits of Formosa, protecting Taiwan from PRC invasion.
- **Winter of 1950/51** – Chinese military victories in Korea caused the Truman Administration to become obsessed over where China might strike next – Hong Kong, Taiwan, or French Indochina. The CIA turns Taiwan into a base for launching clandestine anti-Communist operations throughout Asia. CAT planes airdrop men and supplies to guerrilla teams inside China, which forces Mao Tse-tung to keep combat troops in China that would otherwise have been fighting Americans in Korea.
- Korean War established the CIA's jurisdiction in the Far East and created the basic paramilitary capability that the Agency has employed for twenty years. CAT was an essential component of this paramilitary capability.
- **July 1950** – Al Cox arranges a contract through intelligence sources for CAT aircraft to operate between Japan and Korea.

- **August 25, 1950** – CIA buys CAT. Al Cox and Lew Burridge successfully negotiated with Far East Air Command to use CAT aircraft to carry critical parts and supplies to USAF units in Korea. General Douglas MacArthur, Commander of U.S. forces in Korea, approves the major airlift contract for CAT.
- **December 25, 1950** – CAT's first breakthrough into Indochina. CAT establishes a small but lasting presence by flying the first STEM (Special Technical and Economic Mission) from Tokyo to Hanoi.
- **January 1951** – CAT's role in Korea diminishes as the U.S. Air Force takes over.
- **February 1951** – CAT pilots fly missions to support the invasion of China by Nationalist Army units from their sanctuary in Burma. CAT pilots secretly airlift weapons, supplies, and American advisers to the Nationalist troops. The invading Nationalist Army is easily defeated and quickly retreats to Burma, creating unforeseen problems for U.S. foreign policy for the next twenty years.
- **June 4, 1951** – CAT changes from commercial airline to “almost purely a government operation” per Willauer to CIA in prearranged memorandum.
- **June 30, 1952** – CIA asks Willauer to resign.
- **November 29, 1952** – CAT airplane piloted by Snoddy and Schwartz is shot down over Communist China. Cover story by CAT that the plane was lost over the Sea of Japan is blown in November of 1954 when Communists reveal prisoners sentenced to prison for espionage are CIA operatives Downey and Fectau, the passengers on this ill-fated CAT secret flight in 1952.
- **January 19, 1953** – CIA Officer Al Cox becomes President, Managing Director of CAT.
- **February 26, 1953** – Allen Dulles becomes CIA Director.
- **May 6, 1953** – Operation SQUAW implemented for CAT to drop supplies to the besieged French forces in Na Sam, Laos. This operation marks the first U.S. involvement in Vietnam.
- **June 1953** – Korean War ends.
- **November 1953** – Operation Repeat begins, and CAT evacuates the Nationalist Army from Burma to great public fanfare. Receive a hero's welcome upon arrival in Taiwan. “Soldiers” turned out to be local tribesmen with antiquated weapons, old men, women, and children. The bulk of the Army remained in Burma to lay the foundation for the infamous “Golden Triangle” drug cartel.
- **March 3, 1954** – Contract signed between CAT and France to support the French Foreign Legion at Dien Bien Phu. CAT flies supplies in the face of Viet Minh anti-aircraft even after the French Air Force refuses to do so.

- **May 6, 1954** – CAT pilots, James McGovern “Earthquake McGoon” and Wallace Buford are shot down and killed after making a drop on Dien Bien Phu.
- **May 7, 1954** – French surrender Dien Bien Phu, ending French Colonial rule and marking U.S. entry into the Vietnam War.
- **June 18, 1954** – CIA-backed rebel army invades Guatemala to instigate an uprising against the popular government. Whiting Willauer, newly appointed Ambassador to Honduras organizes CAT-based air support and successfully overthrows the government. The CIA and State Department believe the Guatemalan coup to be a success and use it as a model for future actions.
- **July 1, 1954** – CIA Career Officer George Doole becomes Chief Operating Officer of CAT.
- **1956-1958** – CAT conducts air drops in support of the Tibetan resistance against the Communist Chinese conquest of Tibet.
- **May 18, 1958** – CIA-instigated attempt to overthrow the government of Indonesia results in one of the rebel bombers being hit. The crew bails out and was captured by the Indonesian Army. The pilot was an American, Allen Pope, a CAT employee and a veteran of 57 missions to Dien Bien Phu. The overthrow attempt is unsuccessful and causes embarrassment to the U.S. Government.
- **1959** – Air America becomes an “arm” of CAT. CIA relegates CAT to a cover role during the 1960’s serving as an international flag carrier for the Republic of China.
- **1961** – Pilots from CAT / Air America help train the ill-fated pilots in the Bay of Pigs fiasco in Cuba.
- **1968** – Mandarin Jet has a fatal accident ending CAT as an airline and the era of Air America continues until the fateful evacuation of the Saigon embassy in 1975.

## Overview of CAT's History

*Excerpt from CAT History by Felix Smith*

**Civil Air Transport (CAT) was a unique airline formed in China after World War II by General Claire Lee Chennault, leader of the Flying Tigers, and Whiting Willauer of the China Defense Supplies (CDS).**

They purchased war surplus cargo planes, enrolled WWII veterans, and wound up with an enthusiastic, colorful group of former Flying Tiger aces and CAT airmen from the U.S. Army Air Corps, Navy, and Marine Corps. Many had been highly decorated. Operating under the aegis of the China National Rehabilitation and Relief Association (CNRRRA), CAT distributed food and medicine to the interior of China, where roads, railways, and bridges had been destroyed by Japan's Imperial Air Force.

United Nations relief supplies overwhelmed the docks of Shanghai, with no way to distribute them inland except by navigable rivers and air. When China's Communist 8th Army besieged China's northern cities, we delivered arms, ammo, and food to the defenders and returned to Tsingtao with refugees and wounded soldiers. By the end of 1947, our first year, we had rescued 22,000 refugees and 4,500 wounded Nationalist soldiers from Communist dominated territories. Many of the reinforcements we flew north were draftees of the Nationalist China Youth Corps. They boarded our C-46s in Tsingtao carrying rifles from the First World War and parchment umbrellas. Tin drinking cups dangled from belts of hand grenades, and they wore sneakers, and ever-present military police prevented the kids from deserting. We then knew that Nationalist China faced trouble, and Chennault and CAT would be drawn into China's Civil War, and Chennault would help Chiang Kai-shek resist the spread of a Communist police state.

The other two Chinese airlines, Central Air Transport Corporation (CATC) and China National Aviation Corporation (CNAC) flew alongside us in the distribution of food and medicine, and battling the Communists, but when it became apparent that China was losing its northern cities and the Yangtze River was about to be crossed by Mao's Eighth Army, the Chinese Board of Directors of the other two airlines defected to Beijing, eager to be first in the development of the People's airline. In a surprise departure from Hong Kong, with their corporate officers aboard, CATC and CNAC headed north to Beijing, the newly formed capital of Red China, leaving 71 airliners of their fleet in Hong Kong, where laborers furiously piled spare parts on the People's newly acquired planes. General Chennault's friends had

warned him that the new People's Republic had asked the Soviets for transport planes but had been denied; and when he witnessed the action around the 71 airliners, our leader envisioned a paratrooper attack on Taiwan. Whiting Willauer, a brilliant admiralty lawyer, found a way to ground the planes in Britain's Crown Colony, thus denying Red China the means of an airborne invasion.

**With typical American/Chinese innovation, our WWII landing ship was converted to a sea-going aircraft maintenance and repair factory.**

Magnifluxing tanks with instruments for detecting hidden cracks in landing gear struts and other heavy structures were operable at sea. Machine shops, propeller repair and balancing devices, high-pressure hydraulic test lines, a carpenter shop, an air-conditioned shop for the repair of delicate aircraft instruments, a parachute loft, and a medical clinic were capable of going full-blast while dodging Red invaders. It had reached the safety of Taiwan with a barge full of spare parts in tow.

We provided hope to thousands of freedom-loving war refugees by flying them to Taipei. We rescued the Government's Bank of China silver ingots. And we had precluded a brain drain by supporting doomed cities until their city fathers arranged orderly departures to the island of Taiwan, a 240-mile-long island approximately 90 miles east of the China Mainland. But we had become an airline with no place to go. It was springtime, 1950. We didn't know that another war was imminent. Chennault and Willauer sold their airline to the U.S. Government for a song. Our status as an occasional contractor to the CIA was over. CAT was now the bona fide Air Arm of the CIA, a dynamic instrument of America's foreign policy in Asia. Legally, we became employees of the U.S. Government, albeit secret. Our cover was CAT's passenger schedule, which continued, while the CIA's covert flights appeared to be CAT's cargo charters.

**America's stake in the Vietnam War didn't begin as late as history books specify.**

It began on Christmas Day, 1950, with Operation STEM, America's Special Technical & Economic Mission, the cover for our country's look-see into French Indochina. The Agency's superb officer, Al Cox, assigned this writer to Hanoi and eventually Saigon and Laos as pilot of a CAT C-47. The right seat was occupied by Max Springweiler, who was equipped with the essentials required by a combo pilot-radio operator-flight engineer while airborne, and a mechanic while the plane was on the ground. Max, a veteran of Eurasia, Lufthansa's subsidiary in China in the 1930s, spoke fluent French, English, and German, of course. He had lots of smarts,

and Al Cox believed he was valuable because many of Germany's WWII Nazi officers were practicing their professions in the French Colony. Those interesting days can be told in a later installment on our Website.

After the fall of Saigon signaled the end of the Vietnam War, CAT/Air America would return profit earned by its cover operations (its seemingly civilian airlines), and thus become the only CIA proprietary that didn't cost the Government anything; as a matter of fact, it earned, for the U.S. Government, 23 million dollars.

On November 29, 1952, a few weeks before Bob Snoddy's child was born, he and Norman Schwartz were assigned to snatch a Chinese Nationalist spy, Li Chun-ying, out of Kirin Province, Manchuria, with a new pick-up system, but it was a Red China ambush. CAT's olive-drab C-47 was shot down. John Downey and Richard Fecteau, the CIA officers in the rear prepared to reel the spy aboard, were thrown clear of the crash and lived to serve two decades in a Chinese prison. But Bob Snoddy, WWII USN Patrol Bomber commander (Navy Air Medal, Purple Heart), and Norman Schwartz, WWII U.S. Marine Corps fighter pilot (Distinguished Flying Cross, among other decorations), died. More than half a century later, the U.S. Joint Prisoner of War, Missing in Action Accounting Command (JPAC) retrieved a forearm identified as Snoddy's and returned it to the family's burial plot in Oregon. JPAC, to its credit, steadfastly refuses to close the case of Norman Schwartz. Two stars, representing them, are etched in the granite wall at the entrance to the CIA's headquarters.

### **On May Day, 1953, CAT joined another war - the French Indochina Revolution.**

French President Charles De Gaulle sought American aid. President Eisenhower, reluctant to commit America to another potential ground war in Asia, loaned France six C-119 Flying Boxcars hastily painted with French Air Force insignia. When the French pleaded they lacked pilots familiar with the planes and the time to train them, Civil Air Transport, still a civilian airline bearing the Chinese Nationalist Flag, offered their civilian pilots who were not familiar with the Flying Boxcars either. In typical CAT style, they focused their attention on Ground School for two or three nights at Clark Air Base near Manila, received flight training from superb flight instructors of the USAF Training Command, and arrived in Hanoi on May 6, ready for action. We parachuted arms, ammo, food, and even a few Mack Trucks to scattered French forces while FAF fighter planes strafed the surrounding ground for "Flak Suppression." But we picked up a few holes during afternoon sorties because the French fighter pilots consumed wine at lunch and napped in the afternoon.

French citizens back home and their soldiers in Indochina were fed up with their never-ending Colonial War.

Our sorties ended in a few months, but almost a year later, the C-119 operation resumed. Unknown to French and U.S. Intelligence organizations, the Vietnamese had dismantled 37mm anti-aircraft weapons – a gift from Red China – and carried the pieces on bicycles or their backs to reassemble them in the hills that surrounded the Valley of Dien Bien Phu. They quietly watched brave French soldiers prepare for a decisive battle in the flat valley, which provided an advantage for French field weapons. Attempts to send reinforcements from Haiphong were “quarter-hearted” according to journalists. While the valley fell, decimated French units retreated to surrounding outposts, and CAT pilots flew through flak as thick as that in Germany’s notorious Ruhr Valley during WWII. Flak suppression was slight, nor were the French rescue helicopters apparent. When Paul Holden was wounded by flak, Wally Bufford, keeping the battle-damaged C-119 airborne, applied a tourniquet to Holden’s torn arm and got the Flying Boxcar back to Haiphong. Historian Bill Leary said Buford’s status as a civilian pilot is all that kept him from receiving the Distinguished Flying Cross. Wally was with Jim McGovern on a subsequent flight when they were shot down and crashed across the Viet border near a Lao village. Its people recovered the bodies of McGovern and Buford intact and placed them in a Buddhist tomb.

Five years later, a French graves registration team discovered the wreckage and interviewed the villagers who showed them the burial place. The American military attache in Vientiane so advised, and the message was passed in turn to CAT executives and the CIA. But nothing was done until Historian Bill Leary, about three decades later, found the documentation in U.S. Government archives and notified this writer, who, in turn, gathered his cohorts to fight for the return of the remains. McGovern’s brother, particularly, still suffering from wounds received on D-Day, the invasion of Europe in WWII, pleaded, just get my brother’s remains to Arlington before I die. This did not occur, however. Wally’s body has not yet been found, but McGovern’s bones, positively identified by the new system of nuclear biology, were cremated and interred in one of the walls in Arlington. Had he been a member of the armed services when he died, he would have been entitled to a ground plot.

**In the late 1950s, Allen Pope was shot down, ejected, and landed in the water with a broken leg.**

Sentenced to death by a Communist military court during that time, Allen stuck to the U.S. Ambassador's assertion that he was paid by local rebels. Five years later, Robert Kennedy secured his release.

By 1959, investigative journalists were peeking through holes in CAT's cloak of secrecy. The CIA retained the original name in half of its group while naming the other half Air America. It was only a separation on paper, supported by legal documents, but the cohesion of the whole remained intact. Air crews and mechanics switched allegiances at the stroke of a scheduler's pencil. Even our fixed-in-place secretaries received two paychecks each month; half pay from CAT, the other from Air America. Mechanics were not CAT's or Air America's: they belonged to a still different entity, Air Asia. The legal but operationally fake documents hoodwinked the Evil Empire and even fooled a few CAT/AAM chauvinists, and now a few contemporary CIA folks.

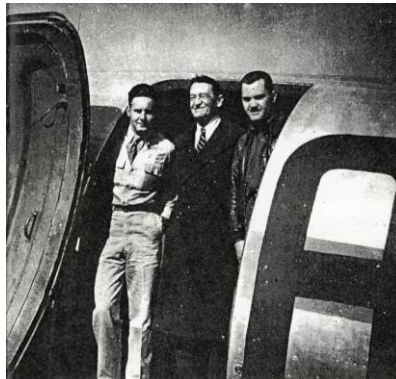
The fall of Saigon signaled the end of America's largest and most cohesive Aerial Empire without a NAME. Just a smattering of odd-shaped jigsaw puzzle pieces with five different titles. Fitted in place, they display a haunting, magnificent masterpiece.

# **Overview of Relief and Rehabilitation Operations**

## **Introduction**

On October 25, 1946, Gen. Chennault and Whiting Willauer signed the contract with China National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (CNRAA) that created CNRAA Air Transport. The agreement allowed the airline to fly relief supplies from port cities to the interior and allow the airline to charge regular commercial cargo rates for the space on return flights.

Acquiring surplus World War II cargo aircraft, CAT's first C-47s (Dakotas) arrived in Shanghai in January 1947. An attempted official start of the airline came on January 29, 1947, from Shanghai to Canton, but the aircraft ran into severe icing and had to return to Shanghai. Two C-47s inaugurated relief operations from Canton to Liuchow on February 2, 1947.



**Gen. Chennault on C-47 at Liuchow with  
Capts. Doug Smith (l) and Bob Rousselot**

The first four of seventeen (fourteen for flight; 3 for spare parts) initially planned C-46s (Commandos) arrived in Canton on March 2, 1947. The C-46 became the backbone of CAT's fleet for the next decade.

## **Anywhere, Anything**

In March-May 1947, Operation "Bo-peep" involved CAT's airlift of 425 sheep from Shanghai to Lanchow in Kansu Province. CAT also carried 200 sheep from Shanghai to Peking. Not only was the first "Bo-peep" airlift of sheep successful, but Capt. Bob Rousselot was able to arrange for a return load of bristles, which brought the Chinese government precious foreign exchange.



### **Operation “Bo-peep”**

Sheep would not be the only live animals airlifted by CAT – silkworms, chickens, pigs, rabbits, cattle, goats, and even elephants. This helped to establish CAT’s reputation for carrying cargo anywhere, anything.

CAT’s ton-miles of relief and rehabilitation supplies accumulated, but by April 1947, Gen. Chennault and Whiting Willauer realized that additional cargo had to be found to operate at full capacity. They sought and obtained approval for an amendment of their contract to carry any cargo on China’s approved import list. This approval, plus a contract with the Chinese Post Office to carry mail contributed to a sharp increase in ton-miles and helped to solve the problem of locating return loads from the interior.

For the remainder of 1947, CAT set records of ton-miles flown, but CNRRA was scheduled to go out of business at the end of 1947. Chennault and Willauer began working to establish the airline on a more permanent basis.

## Partnership with Civil Aeronautics Administration

On January 2, 1948, Chennault and Willauer signed a draft agreement for continued operations of the airline under the control of the Ministry of Communications – confirmed by the final contract on May 28, 1948. The authorized name of this partnership became: “Civil Air Transport of the Civil Aeronautics Administration, Ministry of Communications.” CAT’s aircraft would temporarily show this CAT - Civil Aeronautics Administration livery. The partnership was a strategic and legal move to allow CAT, as American-owned, to operate during the Civil War.



**C-46 with Civil Air Transport Civil Aeronautics Administration livery**

As the Chinese Civil War intensified in 1947 and escalated even further in 1948, relief missions shifted gradually more toward commercial operations, and CAT found itself providing airlift and airdrop operations to the Nationalist forces. This role of Support of Military Operations in the Chinese Civil War would continue to the Korean War, French Indochina War, Cold War, and the beginnings of the Vietnam War.

# Overview of Support of Military Operations

## Introduction

CAT supported the Nationalist forces in the Chinese Civil War -- airlift and airdrop of troops, supplies, and ammunition, evacuation of wounded soldiers and refugees, and evacuation of key officials and treasury to Taiwan.

Because CAT flew night missions, CAT consistently provided more flights than the Chinese Air Force and the other airlines – China National Aviation Corporation and Central Air Transport Company.

## Besieged Cities

CAT conducted airlift and airdrop operations of besieged cities: **Mukden**, Manchuria -- badly needed supplies delivered; **Linfen**, Shanxi -- bombs tossed from C-46, CAT personnel rescued in L-5 aircraft; **Weishien**, Hebei -- flares and beer bottles dropped from C-47, CAT personnel rescued; and **Hsuehchow**, Jiangsu -- airlift of rice, ammunition; wounded flow out. In each of these besieged cities, CAT personnel put their lives at risk and demonstrated their courage and tenacity. From that emerged the “*CAT Spirit*” – to get the job done no matter the odds. In Part II of this book, the articles “The World’s Most Shot At Air Line” and “Louise Peeks at War” cover CAT actions in some of these besieged cities.

A major CAT airlift operation was to provide airlift and airdrop support from Tsingtao to Marshall Yen Hsi-san at **Taiyuan**, 1948 – 1949. During the period December 16 – 29, 1948, 109 flights, including night drops were made. Airlift had to be stopped on February 10, 1949, when fuel ran out at Tsingtao. Airlift continued in March 1949 with fuel from the Chinese Air Force. Unfortunately, Taiyuan fell in April 1949.

As the China mainland fell to the Communists, CAT flew evacuation of government officials, soldiers, dependents, refugees, and foreign nationals from cities about to fall and transported government records, gold, and other assets to Taiwan.

CAT relocated its operations to Taiwan and became the main commercial airline for the Republic of China. In 1950, the CIA acquired CAT to use it as a proprietary airline, forming the foundation for covert operations in Asia.

## **Korean War**

When the Korean War broke out, CAT offered its air transport capabilities and received a major airlift contract from the U.S. Air Force. CAT made a crucial contribution to the airlift of tons of supplies and mail to Korea and the return of wounded soldiers.

## **Indochina**

CAT pilots flying C-119 U.S. Air Force flying boxcar aircraft with French Air Force insignia in the French Indochina War, i.e., Dien Bien Phu, were considered covert operations in support of U.S. national security objectives. After the Geneva Accords, CAT flew evacuation missions from North Vietnam to South Vietnam. In Laos, CAT supplied airlift to Royal Lao Forces and Hmong guerillas.

## **Name Change to Air America**

In 1959, CAT, Inc. was renamed Air America, reflecting organizational restructuring and increased covert roles. Air America reflected a broader effort, perhaps to enhance deniability and be harder to trace to its origins or CIA ties.

# **Overview of Covert Operations**

## **Introduction**

CAT's involvement in Covert Operations began even before its formal purchase by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in August 1950. In May 1949, Gen. Chennault had first meetings with the CIA officials about utilizing CAT to help save China; contract work began in October 1949 to fly for the CIA.

Most of the covert missions, from 1950 to 1961, involved airlift and airdrop, such as to Mainland China, Burma, China Coastal Islands, Dien Bien Phu, Guatemala, and Tibet. Some missions also involved strafing and bombing, such as in Indonesia and the Bay of Pigs.

## **Airdrops and Mainland Overflights**

CAT Chief Pilot Bob Rousselot was the key link to the CIA for covert missions, enabling and facilitating the scheduling of pilots and crew for commercial as well as covert flights. Beginning in 1950, CAT made over 100 perilous missions over mainland China with risks of capture, imprisonment, and death. Chinese pilots took flights as assigned or looked for other jobs. Long-range penetration missions began in March 1952 using C-47, C-54/DC-4, and B-17 aircraft. Some CAT operations were kept secret from the Chinese Nationalists, particularly involving “third force” Chinese recruited by the CIA and not known to the Nationalists. In the words of a CIA case officer: “CAT never let us down.”

## **Burma Li Mi Project**

In 1951, CAT C-46 and C-47s airlifted arms and ammunition to Bangkok for further transport to Nationalist Gen. Li Mi in Burma; and C-47 aircraft transported weapons to Northern Thailand. Later, there was the airdrop of supplies for Li Mi en route to Yunnan and airdrops for Li Mi's subordinates in Yunnan. The Li Mi Project accomplished little as there were heavy casualties as the force was chased out of Yunnan. There was no uprising in Yunnan and no diversion of Communist troops from the ongoing Korean War. Meanwhile, American–Burmese relations suffered.

## **China Coastal Islands**

During the period 1951 -1955, using C-46, PBYs, and Grumman Goose aircraft, CAT conducted airborne intelligence missions and the airdrop of agents, leaflets weapons, and supplies and rescue of wounded covering the China coastal islands – mostly Quemoy, Matsu, Tachen, and Pai Chuan. Captains Connie Seigris and Don Teeters piloted the PBYs and Grumman Goose.



**CAT PBY-5A**



**Grumman Goose**



**Western Enterprises, Inc. PBY-5A**

## **Manchuria**

A CIA mission over Communist China on November 29, 1952, resulted in CAT pilots Norman Schwartz and Bob Snoddy being shot down in their C-47 in Manchuria. The mission involved the attempted “snatch” of an agent using a skyhook. However, the deployed team had been “turned” or “doubled.” The pilots died on the scene and were honored with stars at the CIA Memorial Hall. On the flight were two CIA operatives, John Downey and Richard Fecteau. A cover story by CAT was that the plane was lost over the Sea of Japan, but this story was blown when the Communists revealed that the prisoners had been captured and sentenced for espionage. China released Fecteau in 1971 and Downey in 1973.

## **French Indochina**

One of the early CAT involvements in French Indochina was a December 1950 contract with the U.S. Special, Technical, and Economic Mission (STEM) to airlift urgently needed medical supplies from Tokyo to Hanoi. In early 1951, a C-47 was permanently assigned to Saigon for STEM. In the fall of 1951 “Earthquake McGoon” volunteered to fly CAT’s C-47 in Indochina. By the fall of 1953, a second C-47 was flying in Vietnam. The French colonial situation continued to deteriorate. In May 1953, CAT dropped supplies to the besieged French forces in Na Sam, Laos in Operation SQUAW. This marked the first U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

In April 1954, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles discussed with President Eisenhower the dire French situation in Indochina, where the French wanted to borrow U.S. Air Force C-119 and crews. Sending U.S. combat troops to Indochina was out of the question. Having checked with his brother, Allen Dulles, Director of Central Intelligence, who in turn had checked with CAT’s Al Cox, on the use of civilian, i.e., CAT pilots, Dulles presented this alternative to Eisenhower – and Eisenhower approved the project – known to CAT as SQUAW II and having only American pilots to fly the C-119s painted with French Air Force insignia.

CAT pilots were given accelerated orientation and flying instructions for C-119s at Clark Air Force Base and then moved on to Cat Bi Airfield, Haiphong. The airdrop of supplies and parachutists at Dien Bien Phu began in March 1954. It was a three-hour round trip for three minutes over the target with little or no air cover by the French Air Force.



**Parachutists Exiting C-119**

On April 24, 1954, CAT's first casualty was Capt. Paul R. Holden, flying with Wallace A. Buford, where their C-119 was hit by antiaircraft fire, severely wounding Capt. Holden's right arm. Buford completed the airdrop and returned to base.

On May 6, 1954, Capt. James McGovern and Wallace Buford became the first aviation casualties in the Vietnam War as their C-119 was hit by intense antiaircraft fire. The next day, Dien Bien Phu surrendered. In his book *Perilous Missions on Civil Air Transport and CIA covert operations in Asia*, William M. Leary cited Dien Bien Phu "as CAT's finest hour...the pilots flew through the flak-filled skies ...out of patriotism, personal pride, and because of the *esprit de corps* that Chennault earlier had nurtured in the American Volunteer Group (Flying Tigers) had passed over to CAT."

CAT operations in Indochina continued after the fall of Dien Bien Phu with C-119 airdrops and airlift to French outposts. The French left Indochina upon signing the Geneva Agreement on July 21, 1954. Where the Geneva Agreement resulted in the division of North and South Vietnam, CAT charter operations evacuated refugees from Hanoi to Saigon and Nationalist supporters who wanted to leave North Vietnam.

## **Guatemalan Coup**

In 1954, CAT pilots flew C-47s for rightist Castillo Armas to overthrow the leftist Guatemalan President Guzman. The C-47s transported arms and supplies from Panama to Honduras and Nicaragua. Supplies were also airdropped to rebel forces, and leaflets were dropped over Guatemala. The coup d'etat was successful. Not surprisingly, the U.S. Ambassador to Honduras at the time was Whiting Willauer, who arranged for CAT's involvement.

## **Tibet**

During 1958 -1959, CAT supported rebel groups in Tibet. There was a DC-4 airlift of arms to East Pakistan for resistance groups and later C-118A/DC-6 airlift and airdrop to resistance groups. CAT also transported resistance groups to Kadena Air Force Base, Okinawa for training and return. The last C-118A/DC-6 CAT flight in 1959 was replaced with an Air America C-130A.



**C-118A/DC-6 at Kurmitola, Pakistan**

## **Operation Haik Indonesia**

CAT C-46 and C-54 missions airlifted ammunition, weapons, and supplies to rebels in Padang, Sumatra. PBYS were used for the infiltration of paramilitary forces and supplies, recon missions for B-26s, and search and rescue. B-26s were used for strafing and bombing.



**PBY**



**B-26**

Capt. Al Pope was shot down over Ambon, Indonesia flying a B-26 on May 18, 1958, on a bombing and strafing mission in support of rebels to overthrow President Sukarno. He bailed out, was captured, and placed under house arrest. He was condemned to death in 1960 but released by President Sukarno in 1962. In his own words, Al Pope stated: "I'm a Communist fighter. I was born and raised to be against Communists."

## **Bay of Pigs**

CAT and Air America pilots flew missions during the Bay of Pigs invasion April 17-20, 1961, flying out of Retalhuleu, Guatemala, and Puerto Cabezas,

Nicaragua – B-26 strafing missions and PBY search and rescue missions during the battle. The pilot logbooks reflected civilian flights.

# Overview of Commercial Operations

## Introduction

CAT's Commercial Operations evolved from its early days carrying United Nations relief and rehabilitation cargo from ports to the China interior, then bringing out raw materials to the ports. In 1948, CAT changed from a relief to a contract airline for the Chinese government. This engulfed CAT in the Chinese Civil War -- CAT airlifted supplies, food, and ammunition to besieged cities, and evacuated troops to safety. CAT also engaged in charter operations, such as special airlift support in New Zealand and charters for special delegations.

## Cargo and Passengers

Cargo-carrying C-46 and C-47 aircraft were the mainstay aircraft for airlift missions. In late 1948, CAT started weekly flights to parts of China in cargo configuration. In March 1949, scheduled flights began from Kunming – Haiphong – Chungking and from Canton to the China interior.



**CAT C-46 in-flight**

Passengers initially were seated in bucket seats along the sides of the aircraft with cargo lashed in the center aisle. As routes developed, these cargo-configured aircraft transformed into plush passenger configurations. In June 1949, C46 XT 810 was pushed-up for passenger service.



**C-47 Cargo & Passengers**



**C-46 Pushed-Up for Passenger**

## Expansion of Routes

In April 1950, CAT and Pacific Overseas Airlines Siam inaugurated weekly round trip service from Singapore – Bangkok – Hong Kong – Taipei – and Tokyo, where CAT was responsible for the Hong Kong – Taipei – Tokyo leg.

In June 1950, CAT initiated four times a week “round the island” flights in Taiwan with C-47 aircraft: Taipei – Hualien – Taichung – Tainan – Makung. Revenues from the Korean



**1950 Route Map, Taiwan**



**Capt. Bigony in C-47, Tainan**

Airlift helped to enable the start of regular

commercial routes, such as from Tokyo to Korea and Okinawa, connecting to Taipei and Hong Kong, and later to Manila and Bangkok.

CAT's designation as Asia's Airline of Distinction evolved from C-46 passenger service to four-engine DC-4 flights, followed by the Mandarin Flight DC-6B service, and the Mandarin Jet. Regular scheduled DC-4 flights from Hong Kong – Taipei – Tokyo began in September 1952. Mandarin Flight DC-6B service began in October 1958. The last DC-4 international flight was in July 1961; it was then used for round-the-island flights.



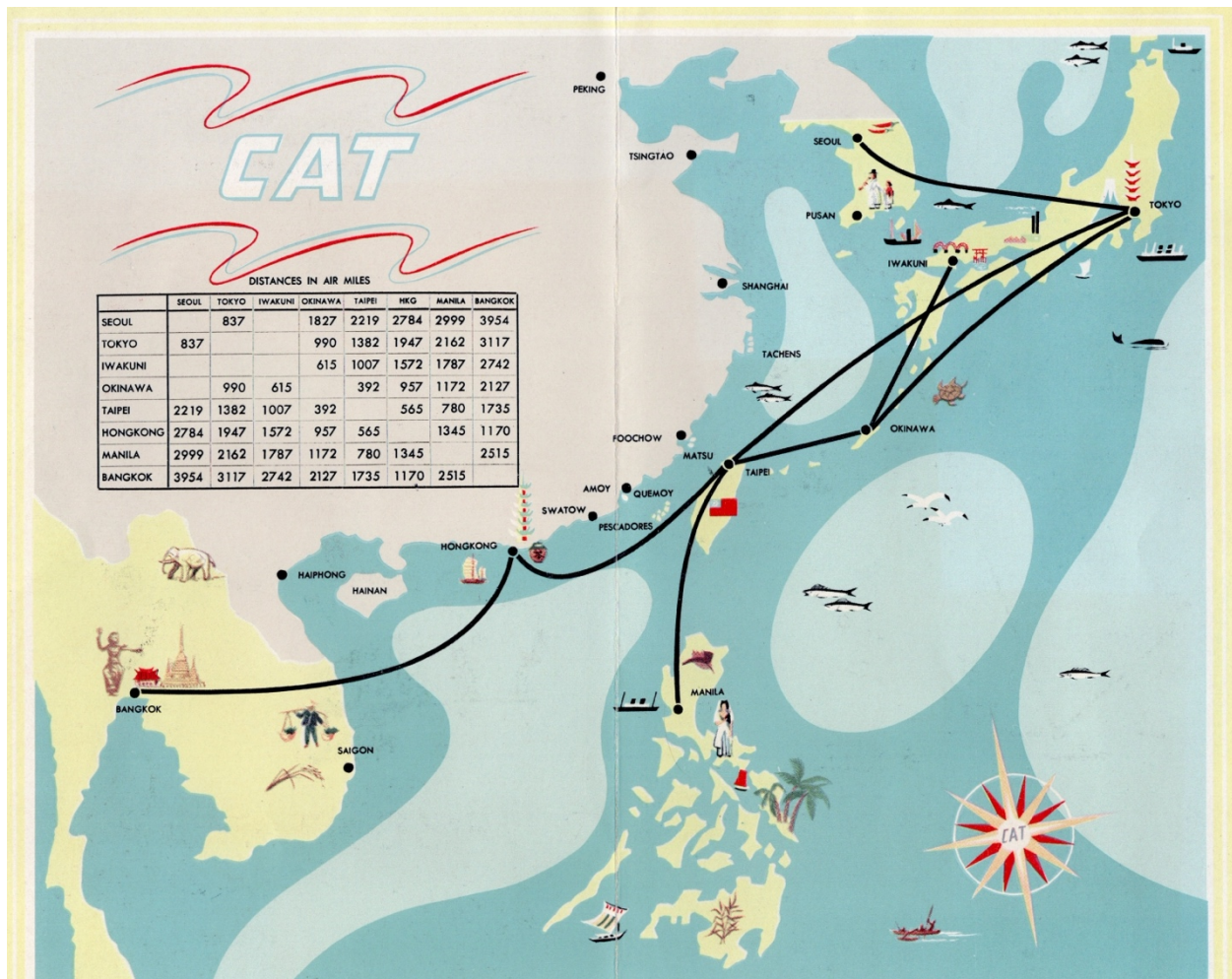
**C-46 with Flight Attendants**



**DC-4 Inaugural Flight at Hong Kong**



**Capt. Hicks and Crew, DC-6B**



DC-6B

CAT introduced jet passenger service in July 1961 – the maiden flight of its Convair 880-M from Taipei to Hong Kong. CAT was the first airline to operate pure jet service on regional routes in the Far East.



**Convair 880-M**



**Interior of Convair 880-M; Flight Attendants**



**Interior of Convair 880-M**

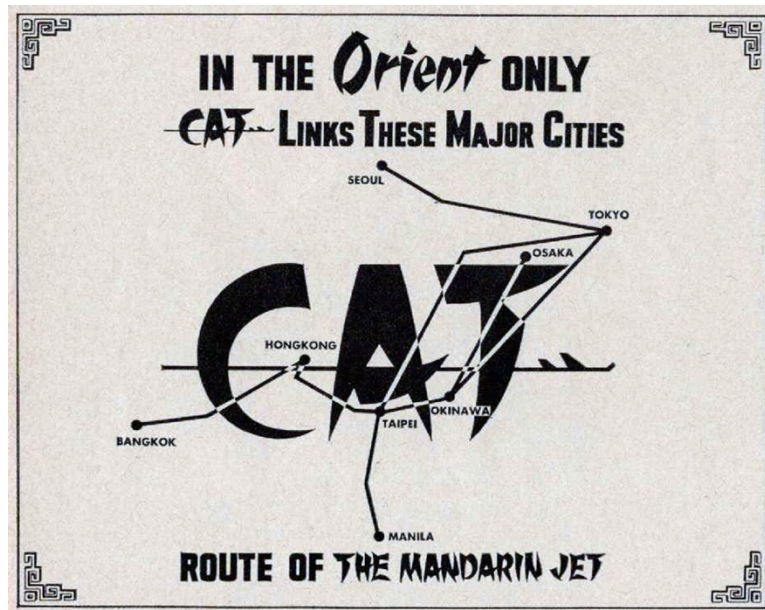


**Flight Service**



**Flight Attendants**

CAT Captains Felix Smith, Douglass Smith, Harry Cockrell, Stuart Dew, Weldon Bigony, Paul Holden, and David Davenport were the initially selected captains to fly the Mandarin Jet.



**Route of Mandarin Jet**

In January 1968, Boeing 727 replaced the Convair 880-M as the Mandarin Jet. The Boeing 727 had a fatal accident in February 1968 ending CAT as an airline.



**Boeing 727**