

PART V. Legacy of CAT

Chairman's Notes on History and Legacy The Legacy of CAT

Chairman's Note on Our History and Legacy

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GENERAL CLAIRE CHENNAULT's lineage spans four centuries of history.

CAT's life span: 22 years; Air America 16. CAT and CIA combo 9 years; Air America 7. CAT and Air America and CIA combo: CAT 18 years; Air America 16. This is only a numbers game.

The CIA invented a shell game to hoodwink the Evil Empire. A few CATs, AAM & CIA folks fall for it today. It's over. It has been declassified.

CAT & AAM are vastly different on paper but operated as one. The U.S. Government bought CAT in 1950. Air America's birth date: 1959.

Alone with the CIA, CAT saw Korea, the French Indochina revolution, Laos, and the first half of America's Vietnam before Air America was born. A single corporation - CAT - operated overtly and covertly.

By the mid-1950s, the secret leaked. A Taipei bus stewardess sometimes announced, "This is the home of Mr. Ray Cline, head of the U.S. Navy Medical Research Group, but actually it's the CIA." Bangkok English Language newspapers, printing news of CAT which began, "Civil Air Transport, the CIA airline,---"

CIA lawyers invented separate, corporations -- a shell game that was so effective, it even hoodwinks a few CATs, AAMs & CIA cousins today. Operations and maintenance folks operated as one entity.

Pilots switched at Bangkok to fly in Laos or got assigned to other covert missions. Most ops personnel received two paychecks a month -- half-pay from CAT, half from Air America.

So when you see the Air America slogan, "Anywhere, Any Time" Professionally, know in your head that it's well-deserved, but know in your heart, that this description appeared in two publications in the '50s. Air America hijacked it and added the most important word, "Professionally." AAM vets deserve our thanks, we didn't have the wit to pick it up.

But when you see, on various Websites, its CAT-smothering medallion sold by the CIA's souvenir shop, in Langley, "*Air America, 1947-1975*," laugh like you would at a three-dollar bill.

Stand tall and proud as a 14-carat living jewel of who and what you represent -- two decades of America's history, half the legendary lineage of Chennault.

The Legacy of CAT

by Bill Chen

Civil Air Transport distinguished itself as an airline flying regularly scheduled flights throughout Asia and as a “CIA’s Secret Airline,” undertaking clandestine air missions in support of friendly forces throughout the Far East and then the world.

The Legacy of CAT is its history of courage, tenacity, and prowess in flying humanitarian, military, covert, and commercial operations as manifested by “The Spirit of CAT” in supporting freedom-loving people – a can-do reputation with a high degree of professionalism, ingenuity, and calm under pressure – the determination to get the job done no matter the odds.

“The Spirit of CAT is a carry-over of the achievement and legacy of Gen. Claire L. Chennault’s American Volunteer Group, legendary leader of the Flying Tigers and commander of the 14th Air Force. In her memoir, **A Thousand Springs**, about her life with Gen. Chennault, Anna Chennault referred to Chennault’s Triple Miracles as the American Volunteer Group, 14th Air Force, and the “CAT” airline. She dedicated the book to all the associates who made the Triple Miracles happen.

William Casey, Director, Central Intelligence Agency, called CAT: “Secret soldiers of the Cold War.”

Tribute has been given to CAT by American academic and aviation historian William M. “Bill” Leary, author of **Perilous Missions**, who characterized CAT as:

“...Secret Flagship company of long line of CIA air proprietaries that would flourish in East Asia”...Dien Bien Phu “had been CAT’s finest hour...They flew through the flak-filled skies over Dien Bien Phu 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...”

James Glerum, CIA Paramilitary Case Officer — Special Activities Division — wrote, “...we routinely asked them to undertake missions that

we could not conduct ourselves, and to hardship and hazards we have only rarely asked our own people to face.”

U.S. Air Force Captain Annis Thompson from his book, *THE GREATEST AIRLIFT: The Story of Combat Cargo*:

“In the early days of the Korean War when the 374th Troop Carrier Wing was doing most of the flying, and military aircraft and crews were in short supply, the additional capacity of CAT flying out of Tachikawa, Japan, was extremely important in airlifting high priority cargo, mail, and personnel to Korea, and in evacuating the wounded from Korea to hospitals in Japan... CAT civilian pilots carried all types of cargo to practically every airstrip in Korea capable of landing a C-46, including ammunition, gasoline, rations, aircraft parts and engines, medical supplies, tents, and tanks. Nothing was too dangerous to deliver to the fighting men in Korea and CAT pilots took their chances with the other men of Combat Cargo in a round-the-clock operation...”

Beyond these tributes, the legacy of Civil Air Transport endures in many other dimensions. CAT was more than an instrument of covert operations and wartime support; it also carried out vital humanitarian missions, including refugee evacuations, medical supply deliveries, and disaster relief flights, often under perilous conditions. Its pilots pioneered flying techniques in mountainous terrain and hostile skies, setting standards of airmanship that influenced both military and commercial aviation.

CAT’s impact extended beyond the cockpit. It trained a generation of Asian pilots, mechanics, and support staff. As a visible and active presence across Asia, CAT also symbolized America’s resolve to resist Communist expansion, serving as a bridge of strength and reassurance to freedom-loving nations during the Cold War.

On June 2, 2001, the CIA recognized and honored Civil Air Transport and Air America with a Unit Citation at a joint CAT and Air America convention in Las Vegas. The citation eloquently spoke to the superior airmanship and sacrifice of individuals in the defense of freedom under hazardous conditions.

The CIA also presented individual citations recognizing the specific accomplishments of Hugh L. Grundy, President of CAT, and Robert E. Rousselot, Vice President of Operations of CAT.


The United States of America



Central Intelligence Agency

IN COMMEMORATION

During the hottest days of the Cold War, the aircrews and ground personnel of Civil Air Transport and Air America gave unwavering service to the United States of America in the worldwide battle against communist oppression. Over the course of four decades, the courage, dedication to duty, superior airmanship, and sacrifice of these individuals set standards against which all future covert air operations must be measured. From the mist-shrouded peaks of Tibet, to the black skies of China, to the steaming jungles of Southeast Asia, the legendary men and women of Civil Air Transport and Air America always gave full measure of themselves in the defense of freedom. They did so despite often outdated equipment, hazardous terrain, dangerous weather, enemy fire, and their own government bureaucracy. Their actions speak eloquently of their skill, bravery, loyalty, and faith in themselves, each other, and the United States of America.


George J. Tenet
Director of Central Intelligence
2 June 2001