

# CAT Profiles:

Captain A. Lewis "Lew" Burrige, Jr.

Sam Burrige  
CAT Association Annual Reunion  
Detroit, MI - October 6, 2023



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## Overview

- Early Life and Marine Corps Service
- **CAT Pilot and Area Manager (1946 - 1951)**
  - Flying CAT's First Aircraft
  - Running Tsingtao
  - The Wei Hsien Incident
  - Evacuation to Taiwan
- Later Life



Pictures c. Felix Smith

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## Early Life

- **Born:** June 18, 1920 in Crystal Falls, MI
- **Parents:** A. Lewis Burridge Sr. and Edith Alberta Erikson of Cadillac, MI
- **Siblings:** George, William Albert ("Bo"), May Belle and Charles ("Kinney")
- **A "flying family":** pilot's licenses held by the brothers and their mother



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## Marine Corps Service

- **December 7, 1941:** Joins the Marine Corps as an aviator (lieutenant) aged 21, alongside his brothers
- **1941-1945:** Flew as a multi-engine instructor at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, NC
- **January 1945:** Brother Bo dies in a crash at Tinian in the Marianas Islands
- **February 1945:** Arrives in the Pacific Theatre at Tinian
- **After VJ Day:** transfers to Marine Corps airfield in Tsingtao, China



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## Joining CAT

- **1946:** CAT begins looking for experienced pilots in China
- Dick Rossi, Flying Tigers ace and CNAC pilot with 735 missions over the Hump, arrives at Tsingtao to recruit pilots (although Rossi never flew for CAT)
- Var Green and Lew Burrige are hired and placed on standby while CAT acquires capital and planes



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## Flying CAT's First Aircraft

- CAT gets its start-up capital to buy surplus aircraft from Manila; Chennault sends Lew Burrige ahead with \$500 to get the airplanes working, fueled, and back to Shanghai
- **January 26, 1947:** CAT's first three C-47s are flown from Clark Field in Manila, Philippines to CAT's Hungjao airstrip in Shanghai by pilots Stu Dew, Weldon Bigony, Var Green, Paul Holden, Bill Hobbs, and Lew Burrige



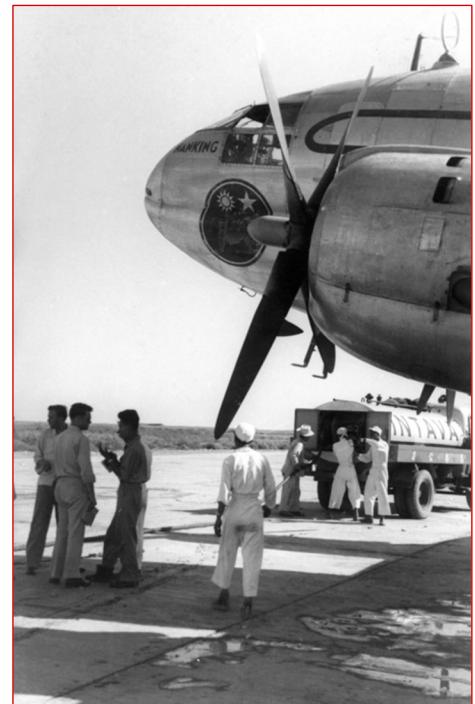
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## Running Tsingtao

- **Early 1947:** Bill Freeman, Harry Cockrell and Lew Burridge are appointed area managers as CAT expands operations
- Lew Burridge returns to Tsingtao to manage CAT's northern operations—just across the airfield at Tsan Kuo from his old Marine buddies!



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# Running Tsingtao



濟南電力有限公司  
 TSINAN POWER COMPANY N. R. C.  
 TSINAN, SHANTUNG, CHINA.  
 Cable Address: 7193. Telephone: Head Office 4030. Power Plant 1500, 297, 173.

TSINAN, September 7th, 1946.  
 P. O. Box 46

Captain L. Burridge,  
 Director of operations  
 North China Area. CAT.  
 Tsingtao.

Dear Sir,

Under your able guidance your pilots did indeed an excellent piece of relief work, when they brought the urgently needed boiler tubes and other important materials to Tsinan.

The arrival of these goods makes it possible for us to carry out the necessary repairs at the Tsinan Power Plant and thus secure against a breakdown of the electric current and the water supply for the city.

We therefore consider it our pleasant duty to express to you and the whole staff of the CAT our heartiest thanks. We do so also in the name of the inhabitants of this town, who benefit most. We shall see to it that every one of them will know what valuable service the CAT rendered us.

Trusting that we can in future also reckon on your assistance,

we remain, dear Sir,  
 Very truly yours  
 TSINAN POWER COMPANY, N.R.C.  
*J. C. Chang*  
 Ch'ang Yin Chi,  
 Manager.

c. c. to General Claire Chennault.  
 Shanghai.

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# The Wei Hsien Incident

- **June 1947:** After the fall of Beijing to Mao's forces, the Communists moved south towards Nanking and Shanghai—in their way was Wei Hsien, a major rail hub
- Communist forces cut off all major surface links into the city, so Lew Burridge led CAT operations to airlift UN relief aid from Tsingtao and even continued regular passenger, mail and freight service
- Lew flew to Wei Hsien himself with John Plank to speak with the garrison commander General Chang Tsien Tso and others and assess the situation on the ground; Edwin Trout flew the C-46 back that same night



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## The Wei Hsien Incident

- Lew received a military escort back to the airfield the next day but when the CAT C-46 coming to pick him up tried to land, it was fired at from the ground and had to return to Tsingtao, abandoning Lew and his crew
- CAT vice president "Whitey" Willauer personally ordered that a C-46 orbit the airfield 24/7 while rescue efforts were coordinated
- By then, the airfield was already occupied by Reds and no C-46 could land at Wei Hsien
- Within the walled city, the residents helped extend a soccer field 400 feet to possibly allow lighter aircraft to land inside the city



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## The Wei Hsien Incident

- **The first L-5 arrives:** The Marines at Tsingtao, aware of their friends' plight at Wei Hsien, left an unmarked and fully-fueled L-5 plane at the CAT pad, unable to directly intervene themselves; Richard Kruske landed it successfully within the soccer field at Wei Hsien
- Willauer orders "first in, first out": Lew and the mail ride with Kruske out, but the plane crashes after striking a nearby rooftop. Fortunately, no injuries, but now three CAT pilots are trapped in Wei Hsien.
- Louise Willauer recounts: "The pilots gaily radioed back: 'Please send us a fourth pilot for bridge!'"



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## The Wei Hsien Incident

- **The second L-5 arrives:** The next morning, Edwin Trout lands another L-5 in Wei Hsien, but breaks the prop braking into the wall. Now four pilots are trapped in Wei Hsien. They radio back "Thanks, now please drop us a pack of cards!"
- A replacement prop and playing cards were airdropped that afternoon, but attacks by the Reds were so fierce that no one risked taking off until the next morning
- The next morning, Lew and Richard Kruske finally fly out of Wei Hsien successfully; Lew coordinates rescue efforts from Tsingtao for the remaining two pilots



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## The Wei Hsien Incident

- **The third L-5 arrives:** Rousselot flies in to Wei Hsien to pick up Plank, but this plane crashed again (without injury) on takeoff. Now 3 are trapped in Wei Hsien again.
- **The Cub arrives:** M.J. Staynor flies a CAT Cub into Wei Hsien and picks up Trout without incident. However, when he flies back for Rousselot, he breaks a prop on landing. After it is repaired, Rousselot flies out with Plank. Rousselot flies one more time to finally rescue Staynor.
- CAT's Chinese personnel in Wei Hsien made it out of the city safely on foot. General Chang bravely held the city to the last, but it fell a few days later to communist forces



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## Evacuation to Taiwan

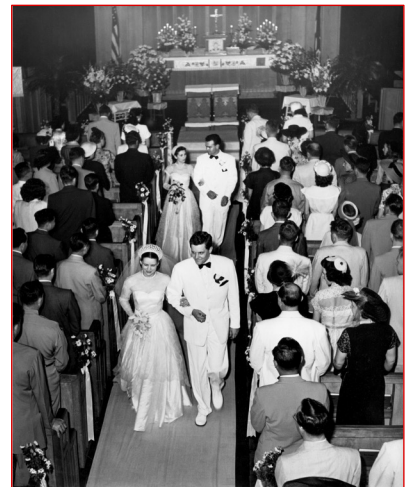
- **May 1949:** Tsingtao falls to communist forces. Lew and CAT evacuate to Shanghai, which itself is under siege. CAT evacuates most of its equipment and personnel to Canton and Hong Kong, but a single C-46 remains in Shanghai with Lew Burridge, Var Green, Earl Willoughey and Pete Dorrance
- **May 15, 1949:** Lew opens a final transit point from Amoy to Taipei, evacuating Nationalist assets and personnel from Chengtu to Taiwan
- Lew advocates for US intervention back home: he writes to newspapers in Michigan and gets an article submitted in the January 1949 Congressional Record. He also advises Yan Xishan, acting president and premier of the Republic of China (1949-50) after Chiang Kai-Shek



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## Later Life

- Lew leaves CAT in 1951 to work for the Sterling Drug Company, but remains closely involved with his friends and colleagues
- Lew is engaged to Ann Patricia Kuzinar in 1950, a State Department secretary in Tokyo—they marry in 1951 with Var Green as his best man and Chennault in attendance



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## Later Life

- Lew and Ann have three children: Lew Burrige III, Carol Burrige, and Laura Burrige Nute
- After 55 years of marriage, Ann passes away in 2006 at the age of 81. Lew joins her in 2011, aged 91.

