

Jose Francisco Gil Jaubert (Jawbert)

April 4, 1925 – April 6, 1976

by Libia Socorro Gil

My father, Jose Francisco Gil Jaubert, was known by his family and friends as a gregarious, adventure-loving, and resourceful man. He was driven by an innate curiosity and had a keen ability to design and build original and functional products. For example, he was prolific in designing and building different types of furniture and constructing an additional room and carport for the family home. Additionally, he meticulously cooked gourmet meals and used a sewing machine to make dresses for his daughters. Indicative of his curious mind, his mother once described how he immediately disassembled the family's first, newly-purchased radio to determine how it functioned and then successfully reassembled it.

His early travels and multicultural experiences enabled his multilingualism in Spanish, English, and numerous Chinese dialects. His communication skills enhanced his ability to build strong relationships and negotiate business transactions.

Unfortunately, my father spoke little to us about his early life, other than limited travel stories. We know that he relocated with his mother from Costa Rica to Hong Kong in 1937 and remained there until 1941. During that time, he graduated from the Hong Kong Government Airplane Mechanics Training School. Subsequently, he graduated from the U.S. Army Airplane Training School, which resulted in his supporting the American Volunteer Group (AVG) in Burma and later the 14th Air Force in China. Getting to know Gen. Claire Chennault, no doubt, led to his employment in Civil Air Transport (CAT). We are fortunate to have relevant historical documents – letters of recommendation and an immigration application to the United States that show his residences and record of employment. Although there are gaps and unknowns in all his career events, we developed the following chronology of his life:

- April 1925 – October 1937: Limon, Costa Rica
- November 1937 – January 1941: Hong Kong Government Airplane Mechanics School, Hong Kong

- July 1941 – August 1942: Sino-American Aircraft Works, Burma
- September 1942 – May 1943: 14th Air Force, 54th Service Group, Kunming, China
- June 1943 – October 1944: 11th Combat Cargo Squadron, Shanghai, China
- November 1944 – November 1946: 332nd Troop Carrier Squadron, China-Burma-India theater
- January 1947 – January 1948: Chinese Air Force American Engineering Civilian Team
- October 1948 – October 1962: Civil Air Transport, based on receipt of ten-year pin from Mr. Hugh Grundy in October 1958; and Mr. J.E. Burkett, A/Director Aircraft Maintenance, letter of recommendation dated October 4, 1962 stating that Jose, who was with the Company for fourteen years, served as Crew Chief, Ramp Crew at the main base with Air Asia Company Limited in Tainan, Taiwan
- 1963 – 1975: Relocated to Southern California

We can only surmise that after graduating from the Hong Kong Government Airplane Mechanics School in January 1941, he sought work as a mechanic and was hired in Burma by the Sino-American Aircraft Works, which was the China Aircraft Manufacturing Company (CAMCO), headed by William Pawley, the Curtiss-Wright Corporation representative in China. CAMCO supported the American Volunteer Group and assembled the P-40 fighters in Burma. When the AVG disbanded, my father continued supporting the 14th Air Force. Later, he continued work with the U.S. Army Air Forces as a civilian mechanic in the 11th Combat Cargo Squadron and 332nd Troop Carrier Squadron, mostly working on C-46 and C-47 aircraft.

My father joined CAT in Shanghai in October 1948, but we have very little knowledge of his assignments and locations during this time period of the Chinese Civil War.

The publication of the *China Pilot* by Captain Felix Smith in 1995 makes several references (on pages 145,167, 170, 174-6, and 201) to “Jose Jawbert, *our Costa Rican Mechanic.*” There are numerous descriptions of life-threatening escapades, including the capture of CAT employees by the Chinese Communists in January 1950 while supporting a CAT tin airlift at

Mengtze. A letter from C. L. Chennault, reprinted in the book, lists the following CAT Personnel imprisoned: Captain L.R. Buol, Mr. Lincoln Sun, Mr. P.H.Chu, Mr. Y.S. Woo, Mr. Jose Jawbert, Mr. K.N. Mai, Mr. C. Liu, and Mr. C.L. Wong.

My father escaped imprisonment and, years later, received a thank-you letter from Captain Bob Buol for items he had given Buol in prison. Much later, I met Sue Buol, who revealed that the typewritten letter must have been dictated since Bob Buol could not type. My father's survival of imprisonment and his service return reflected the same resilience that defined his work and family life.

I had the fortunate opportunity to meet Captain Felix Smith and enjoyed a delightful conversation in which he emphasized that Jose Gil Jaubert is an "unsung hero." Felix recounted the many incidents where Jose improvised and created airplane parts from metal scraps and other debris to repair damaged planes when no replacement parts were available.

While serving in Shanghai, my father met nurse Phoebe Ling, assigned to the Army Base. A whirlwind courtship resulted in their wedding in Shanghai in 1946. Subsequent evacuations were made to Canton and Hong Kong, where the family remained when he was imprisoned. Our family was also sent to live with extended relatives in Costa Rica for a time.



Jose and Phoebe Jaubert, 1946, Shanghai, China

Eventually, our family with four daughters relocated to Tainan, Taiwan, where they remained until 1963 (a son was born much later in southern California). All of the children attended the CAT K-12 school in Tainan. The children of CAT employees (Morrison, Wueste, Sturgess, Foster, Burkett, and others) were enrolled in the school, which followed the American school curriculum but was managed and taught for a few years by Mr. and Mrs. Skinner, a British couple. There are many fond memories of the school adjacent to the CAT Club, where many CAT families spent long hours in the pool and dining at the restaurant. Ultimately, the CAT school merged with the Jonathan M. Wainwright Navy school, which was operated by the Department of Defense at that time. I graduated from this school.

The photo below shows our family of four girls in Tainan in the 1950s, followed by our extended family in La Habra, California, in December 1975.



Flora, Phoebe, Anna, Libia (behind), Jose, Dinora, 1950s, Tainan, Taiwan



1st row: Flora, Anna, Sean, Dinora holding Libia's daughter, Lelani
2nd row: Jose, Phoebe, Libia

In summary, Jose Gil Jaubert is best described as a creative and resilient individual who took pride in his achievements. He worked diligently to provide for his family and prioritized a quality education as the most valued goal for all his children. Jose and his wife, Phoebe, were most proud of their children's accomplishments:

Sean: Director of Career Center at University of California, Riverside (Hacienda Heights, CA)

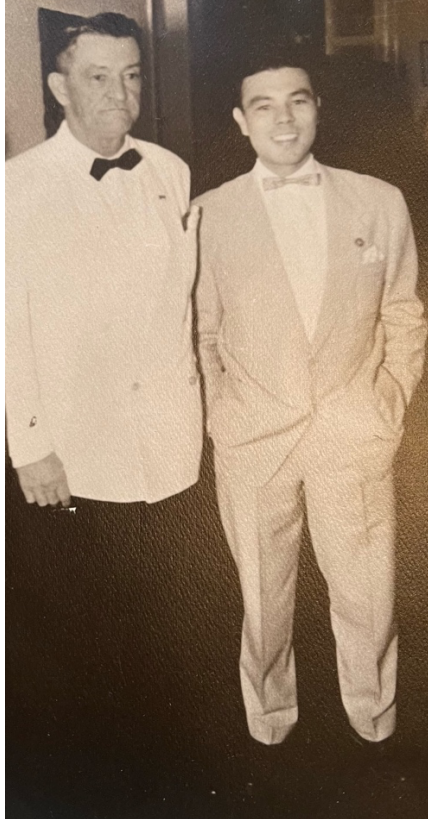
Anna: Molecular Biologist and Attorney, retired (Mill Valley, CA)

Flora: Family Nurse Practitioner, retired (Los Angeles, CA)

Dinora: Emergency Room Physician, retired (Honolulu, Hawaii)

Libia: Superintendent of Schools, retired (San Diego, CA)

At the young age of 51 years old, Jose Gil Jaubert died unexpectedly from coronary heart failure in Southern California. He was most grateful and appreciative for the opportunity to work for Gen. Chennault.



Gen. Chennault and Jose Jaubert