

Claire Lee Chennault and the Problem of Intelligence in China

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Claire Chennault went to China in 1937 as a military adviser to Chiang Kai-shek as Japan's war on China expanded. During late 1940-41 he would organize and command the American Volunteer Group (AVG), popularly known as the "Flying Tigers," an air unit supported covertly by the United States before Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. Chennault understood the value of intelligence and wrestling with the problems of acquiring it during most of his career. Most of what has been written about Chennault has focused on his leadership of the Flying Tigers, his relationship with the Republic of China, and his service during World War II. This article draws from his memoirs and other material to specifically address Chennault's approach to intelligence.

As an officer in the Army Air Corps, Claire Lee Chennault came to realize the importance of intelligence in the early 1930s, when he was the senior instructor in fighter tactics at the Air Corps Tactical School at Maxwell Field in Alabama. He had been trying to modernize fighter techniques and concluded that the "biggest problem of modern fighters was

intelligence. Without a continuous stream of accurate information keeping the fighters posted on exactly where the high-speed bombers were, attempts at interception were like hunting needles in a limitless haystack.”¹

Fighter planes had dominated the skies and military thinking during World War I, but that changed quickly when the war ended. In 1921, Billy Mitchell showed that airplanes could sink captured German battleships and “popularity shifted from the fighter boys... to the lumbering bombers, even then growing bigger and faster.” Bomber advocates believed that the more powerful bombers would always get through and that the fighter planes sent against them would be ineffective. Advances in technology gave weight to their arguments. When the B-10 bomber appeared, it was heavily armed and capable of flying at 235 mph, faster than the P-26 “Peashooter,” the standard fighter of the US Army Air Corps. Major air maneuvers during the early 1930s seemed to prove that “due to increased speeds and limitless space it is

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impossible for fighters to intercept bombers.”²

Chennault was convinced that with modern tactics and timely information the bombers would be intercepted and destroyed. There was no question that interception was difficult. At that time, the only information on incoming bombers that American air defense might get was from a haphazard warning net of observers whose primary function was to alert civilians to take cover. Chennault set out to resolve the dual problems of tactics and intelligence.

To develop new tactics and demonstrate the teamwork that he believed was fundamental to modern fighter tactics, Chennault formed a three-aircraft acrobatic team that became known as “Three Men on a Flying Trapeze.” It represented the Air Corps all over the country



Chennault (middle) as a member of the Flying Trapeze in 1935. Photo © Bettmann/Corbis

and won wide praise. Chennault also tried to advance his ideas by writing articles, and by exploring what was being done elsewhere. He studied the air warning net systems developed in England and Germany and looked for ways to improve them. Among his writings was *The Role of Defensive Pursuit*, which defined the role of defensive aircraft and laid out the thinking that would be the basis for the famous air warning net he would later establish in China.³

Chennault as Collector

The final performance of Chennault’s Flying Trapeze was at the Miami Air Races in December 1935. Among the spectators were representatives from the Chinese Aeronautical Affairs Commission, who were looking for Americans to help build China’s air

force. Chennault was offered a job at the Chinese flying school. It was tempting. His ideas were controversial, his career stalled, and his health not good. He stayed in touch with the Chinese and started to plan his retirement for 1937, when he would complete 20 years of service.

On 30 April 1937 Chennault retired from the US Army Air Corps; the next morning he sailed for

China on a three-month contract to make a confidential survey of the Chinese Air Force (CAF). He interrupted his journey to make a side trip through Japan that would illustrate his far-sightedness, his great interest in intelligence, and the almost natural feel he had for its acquisition.

Billy McDonald was waiting on the dock at Kobe, Japan, when the liner *President Garfield* docked. McDonald was one of the other two pilots on the Flying Trapeze. Chennault had recommended him and several others to the Chinese, and McDonald was now working at the CAF flight school at Hangchow. Had the Japanese known that, they would not have granted McDonald a visa or, as Chennault put it, “ensured the ubiquitous little fellows of the secret police on our trail.”

But McDonald somehow managed to get himself listed as an assistant manager of a troupe of acrobats that was touring Japan and passed through passport formalities unnoticed. He stayed with the acrobats while they appeared at several theaters, then left them in Osaka to be on the dock when the *President Garfield* arrived. In his passport, Chennault was identified as a farmer.

What followed was like the excellent adventure of two young operations officers on a field training exercise. They hired an open car and tried to look like tourists as they “set off to see the country through the

eyes of experienced airmen gauging potential targets.” They hid cameras and binoculars under their topcoats and, with “an unhealthy interest in harbors and airfields,” toured Kyoto, Osaka, and Kobe, then sailed the inland sea where they tried to identify shipping routes and islands where new war industries were being established.

Chennault said nothing in his memoirs about planning for this trip, but he must have done a good deal of it. There was the matter of his identity and McDonald’s “cover,” and the itinerary, which took the two through industrial districts, near construction sites, and to “areas where industry seemed to be expanding with the suspicious speed of a military enterprise.”

The trip was very successful, Chennault thought. They took photos of potential targets and “filled notebooks full of data.” “Much to my surprise,” he wrote, “I found out four years later that our notebooks and pictures contained more information on Japanese targets than the War Department Intelligence files.”⁴ This Japanese interlude gives an excellent insight into Chennault’s thinking at a time when America had virtually no experience in covert collection. It showed the value he set on intelligence and its role in the Pacific war he knew would come—and that he could find ways to get it.

Chennault may have foreseen the war, but he could not have

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imagined how close it already was. He arrived in China on 30 May 1937 and set off on a survey of the Chinese Air Force. He was at a flying school on 7 July, when the Marco Polo Bridge incident occurred. The Japanese, who had held parts of China since 1931, were on a maneuver near the Marco Polo Bridge outside Peking. When one of their soldiers disappeared, the Japanese accused the Chinese of kidnapping him and pressed demands that the Chinese could not meet. They used the Chinese refusal to occupy Peking.

Chennault immediately sent a cable to Chiang Kai-shek, offering his services “in any capacity.” Chiang accepted, and sent him to the CAF’s advanced flight school at Nan Chang to direct air combat training. But Chiang also had more immediate needs. On 13 August, Chennault was included in a meeting of Chiang’s war council. There was no Chinese officer who could organize a large combat mission, and Chennault spent the evening planning the first Chinese air-strike on the Japanese warships that had shelled Shanghai that day. From that point on, Chennault was to have a major role in the war. At the beginning of September, Chiang gave him responsibility for all operations of the Chinese Air Force.

Intelligence was now a major concern. Within the US mili-

tary establishment, “current intelligence on the Orient just didn’t exist,” he wrote. He looked for ways to learn about his enemy, and what he learned he shared with the US embassy. From Japanese airplanes that crashed during the first air battles he salvaged equipment and sent the best of the materiel to the US naval attaché. With the Japanese advancing on Nanking, the attaché secured it in the safest place he knew, aboard the US gunboat *Panay*. Two days later the *Panay* was attacked by the Japanese and sent to the bottom of the Yangtze. With it went Chennault’s collection of Japanese military equipment.⁵

Chennault continued to collect everything he could about the Japanese Air Force, but his efforts made little impression back in Washington. In 1939, the Chinese captured an intact Japanese Type 97 “Nate” fighter. Chennault had it flown in extensive tests against comparable British, American and Russian aircraft and compiled a thick dossier on the Nate’s construction and performance. He believed it was one of the best acrobatic airplanes ever built—“climbs like a skyrocket and maneuvers like a squirrel”—and turned the dossier over to US military intelligence.

In time Chennault received a letter from the War Department. It said that “aeronautical experts believed it was

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impossible to build an airplane with such performance... with the specifications submitted." In late 1940, he visited Washington and brought with him data on the first model "Zero." That information was never disseminated. "American pilots got their first information on its performance from the Zero's 20-mm. cannon a year later over Oahu and the Philippines."⁶

With the air defense of Nanking his responsibility, Chennault established the first of his warning nets. All available information on enemy movements was channeled into a central control room and plotted on a map that Chennault used to control the defending Chinese fighters. He adapted the net as the situation changed and the Chinese withdrew to Hangzhou and Chungking. It would take time before the warning net became what he envisioned, "a vast spider net of people, radios, telephones, and telegraph lines that covered all of Free China accessible to enemy aircraft."⁷

The methodical development of that spider net began later in Yunnan Province. Four radio stations in a ring 40 kilometers outside Kunming city reported to the control center in Kunming. Each radio station was connected by telephone to eight reporting points, with each of those points responsible for a 20 kilometer square of sky. This pattern was repeated to create

additional nets as they were needed, and all the nets were interconnected until there was one vast air warning net spread over all of Free China.

The net was also used to warn civilians of bombing raids and as an aid to navigation. A lost American pilot could circle a village almost anywhere in China and in short order be told exactly where he was—by a net radio station that had received a telephone call from the village he was circling. The net was so effective that Chennault could later say: "The only time a Japanese plane bombed an American base in China unannounced was on Christmas Eve of 1944, when a lone bomber sneaked in...from the traffic pattern of (American) transports circling to land after their Hump trip."⁸

Japanese fighter tactics was another area Chennault avidly pursued. He learned much by watching early air battles over Nanking from the ground, and even more by getting in the sky with the Japanese. When Curtiss-Wright exhibited a P-36 "Hawk Special" at Nanking soon after his arrival in China, he got Madame Chiang, head of a newly created CAF commission, to buy it as his personal airplane. Stripped of all unnecessary equipment, the Hawk Special became "the fastest plane in China skies." With it Chennault got his "first taste of Jap flak and fighter tactics,

and...learned some of the lessons that later saved many an American pilot's life over China." Many believed that he engaged the Japanese aircraft in combat during these forays, but Chennault always denied it.⁹

The Hawk Special was also used extensively to search for Japanese carriers off the coast and to monitor Japanese troop movements. "We proved the value of reconnaissance so effectively that an entire Japanese fighter group near Shanghai was ordered to concentrate on destroying the Hawk Special." The Japanese never did catch the Hawk; it was destroyed on the ground while being flown by another pilot.

"Civilian" Warriors: The AVG

By the autumn of 1940 Japanese advances had made the situation in China desperate. The first of the Japanese Zero models had appeared over Chungking, "like hawks in a chicken yard," and eliminated what remained of the Chinese Air Force. The cities of east China were being bombed regularly and without opposition; a hundred or more Japanese bombers struck Chungking every day. More territory was being lost to the Japanese and even Chiang Kai-shek believed there was a limit to how much the Chinese people could take. He summoned Chennault and presented a plan to buy American airplanes and hire American pilots to fly them.

Chennault did not think it could be done. US neutrality laws stood in the way, as did the lack of aircraft. Every new airplane coming off American production lines not going to the US Army or Navy was committed to the European allies. Chiang's brother-in-law, T.V. Soong, was already in Washington lobbying China's friends. He cabled Chiang that Chennault's presence "would assist in convincing authorities here," and Chennault was on his way in October, for a homecoming that would last into the summer of 1941.

Despite his doubts, Chennault put forward a plan to the War Department that called for 200 bombers and 300 fighters that would use China as a platform to bomb Japan. So large a number of aircraft was clearly impossible. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson thought the idea "rather half-baked," but President Roosevelt started to get interested. The idea of bombing Japan was set aside—the United States was still not at war with Japan—and the plan evolved into protection of the Burma Road with American pilots and 100 fighters. Chennault started working out the details of what would become the First American Volunteer Group (AVG), as a unit of the Chinese Air Force.

Introduction of the Lend-Lease Act after Roosevelt's reelection in November 1940 and its passage the following March made it possible for the US government to help China. Aircraft for the AVG were found

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when the British agreed to decline delivery of 100 ready-to-go P-40 fighters to get 200 P-40s of a later model.

The matter of personnel was more complicated. By law, American citizens could not serve in the armed services of a belligerent foreign power. The solution was to have the men hired by a civilian entity rather than the Chinese government. A company already operating in China fit the bill: The Central Aircraft Manufacturing Company (CAMCO), a private concern that had been assembling, operating and repairing aircraft for China. Majority shares were owned by the Chinese government; a New York company owned the rest.

Roosevelt agreed in April 1941 to let US military reserve officers and active duty enlisted men resign from their service and join the AVG. Roosevelt's agreement was strictly oral; an unpublished executive order cited in many histories appears never to have existed.¹⁰ The AVG would serve the country's best interests, but it was not something that could be done openly. Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox and Acting Deputy Chief of Staff George Brett quietly arranged for CAMCO recruiters to enter bases and recruit officers and men from the US services. In July 1941, having signed one-year contracts, 99 pilots and 186 ground support personnel sailed for

Asia under passports that identified them as farmers, missionaries, acrobats, salesmen, and teachers. It was a formula the US Air Force would use nearly three decades later in Laos to man a radar station that officials could purport was not run by the US government.¹¹

The AVG was called the "Flying Tigers" by the US press after spectacular early success against the Japanese over Rangoon after the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor, the Philippines, Malaya and other Pacific bases. The United States and its Allies were on the defensive everywhere in Asia, and in the popular mind it seemed that only the AVG stood in the way of a quick Japanese victory in Burma and China.

When the AVG was disbanded after the contracts ended on 4 July 1942, it had been in combat for less than seven months. In that time the AVG was credited with destroying 297 enemy aircraft in aerial combat and another 153 probably destroyed. On the ground, AVG pilots destroyed 200 enemy aircraft and great quantities of Japanese supplies and equipment.¹² The pilots attributed their victories to the tactics that Chennault taught them.¹³ It was what he had learned from his years of observing the Japanese Air Force in the skies over China.

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Back in the Army: The Intelligence Options

Chennault was brought back into the US Army, given a brigadier's star and made the ranking American air officer in China. As the China Air Task Force that replaced the AVG grew into the Fourteenth Air Force, Chennault started to receive at least some of the men and airplanes he needed. The effectiveness of the Fourteenth would depend on the accuracy of the intelligence it had to target its bombers.

The intelligence Chennault's force was getting was not up to the job. "Stilwell exhibited a striking lack of interest in the intelligence problems of the China sector of his command," Chennault wrote in his memoir, *Way of a Fighter*. Lt. Gen. Joseph W. Stilwell was the top-ranking American officer in China and, by Chennault's account, was entirely satisfied with the intelligence the Chi-

nese provided, although it was outdated, inaccurate, and useless to the bombers Chennault commanded. But worse than his lack of interest, "Stilwell specifically prohibited the Fourteenth from any attempts to gather intelligence. Since the Fourteenth Air Force was the only American combat organization in China and needed fresh and accurate intelligence...I was again faced with the choice of obeying Stilwell's orders literally...or finding some other method of getting the information so essential to our operations."¹⁵

The intelligence Chennault had to depend on came from the Chinese War Ministry via Stilwell's headquarters in Chungking. By the time it reached the Fourteenth, the information was "third hand... generally three to six weeks old," and useless for targeting the bombers. There was another Chinese intelligence source that Chennault had rejected, the Chinese

Secret Service:

"I avoided a proffered alliance with Tai Li's notorious KMT secret police. It might have been useful, but since Tai's men were engaged in a ruthless manhunt for Communists, it would have meant the end of

our intelligence and rescue relations with Communist armies in the field."¹⁴

For the same reason, Chennault had few dealings with the Sino-American Cooperative Organization (SACO), a US Navy group under Captain Milton "Mary" Miles that worked jointly with Tai Li's organization. A group of SACO navy officers worked in Fourteenth Air Force headquarters under Chennault's command. The officers maintained contact with the Pacific fleet and provided shipping intelligence and photo interpretation. "This effective liaison paid enormous dividends in attacks on enemy shipping." But the intelligence gap on the Japanese Army in China remained. Chennault needed to know what was going on behind the enemy lines, inside Japanese-held territory.¹⁶

"I solved this problem by organizing the Fourteenth's radio-intelligence teams within the framework of our air-raid-warning control network and continued to depend officially on Stilwell's stale, third-hand Chinese intelligence...."¹⁷ The air warning net would support the new effort and serve as its cover. Fourteenth Air Force warning net personnel were already out in the field, living in villages, temples and caves. Chennault's new field intelligence officers would blend into the mix and appear to be part of it until they went beyond the last American outpost and crossed into enemy territory.



Chennault (r) with Chiang Kai-shek and another US Army officer. Undated photo © Bettmann/Corbis

It required men who could pass through the lines and operate in Japanese-occupied territory for extended periods of time. They would report their own observations and recruit agents who would report in a timely manner and on a regular basis the information needed to target the bombers effectively.

“Most of our field intelligence officers were old China hands. I tried to pick men who had lived in China before the war, spoke the language, knew the customs, and could live in the field on Chinese food.” The first one was John Birch, “led into our fold by Jimmy Doolittle after Birch had guided Jimmy and his raiders out of East China.” The famous Doolittle Tokyo Raiders had dropped out of the sky in east China where the young Georgia Baptist had been serving as a missionary. It brought Birch into Chungking where he met Chennault. He wanted to serve God and his country. He was exactly what Chennault was looking for.¹⁸

Chennault sent Birch back to East China to survey secret airfields and gasoline caches, then sent him to work with the guerrillas along the Yangtze River. He recruited agents to report on Japanese shipping by radio and developed target information on his own. Once, when the bombers could not find a huge munitions dump hidden inside a village, Birch passed back through the Japanese line, joined the bombers and rode in the nose of the lead aircraft to guide them directly to the tar-

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get. Birch pioneered the techniques to provide close air support to ground troops. He served as a forward air controller and with a hand-cranked radio talked aircraft down on their targets.

Birch was adept at moving through Japanese lines and became the example for those who followed. He dyed his hair black, dressed as a farmer and learned how to walk like one. He carried names of Chinese Christians to contact in areas he operated in. Church groups became his infrastructure behind the lines, providing food, helpers and safe places to stay. He remained in the field for three years, refusing any leave until the war was over, he said.

John Birch was the pioneer field intelligence officer, and Chennault came to look on him almost as a son.^a Others followed: Paul Frillmann was a Lutheran missionary who first met Chennault in 1938, at a baseball game at Hangzhou. He later served as chaplain for the AVG. After the Japanese surrender he was put in charge of the OSS office in Beijing.¹⁹ Wilfred Smith, the son of a missionary born in China and raised on the Yangtze was a professor of Oriental history; Sam West, a long-time cosmetics salesman in Asia. They

^a Birch was killed in 1945. The John Birch Society would be named after him.

operated alone, or as two man teams, the second man sometimes Chinese. Chennault's agent network eventually spread through many areas of Japanese-occupied China.

In November 1943, OSS chief William Donovan visited China. OSS in China was linked to SACO and entangled with Tai Li's secret police. Donovan came with the intention of splitting OSS off from SACO and operating unilaterally, but it quickly became evident that Tai would not tolerate unilateral OSS operations.²⁰

Donovan looked for a way to work around this and found Chennault willing to help. He agreed to let OSS use the Fourteenth Air Force as cover for its unilateral operations behind Japanese lines. The result was the 5329th Air and Ground Forces Resources and Technical Staff (AGFRTS—or Agfarts, as it became known).²¹ The organization combined OSS and the Fourteenth's field intelligence staff, added OSS Research and Analysis personnel and assumed all intelligence duties of the Fourteenth Air Force.

The arrangement was a happy and very effective marriage. The number of intelligence officers operating inside Japanese-held territory increased greatly, and intelligence broadened to include requirements

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beyond the specific needs of the air force. Chennault was pleased with the results—the Fourteenth now had more intelligence than ever—but his interest in the operation started to wane. In time the entire operation would be managed by OSS.

During his years in China, Claire Chennault set precedents in the way intelligence was acquired and used, long before America had an intelligence service. He was an innovative thinker, unconventional in his views of air warfare and intelligence. He set clear objectives and used intelligence to

reach his goals with the resources available—be it a Chinese villager with a telephone or an “old China hand” who could dye his hair black, speak Chinese and walk like one.

The AVG was largely Chennault’s creation, the product of his planning and leadership. The air tactics he taught his men were the result of intelligence he gained by his study of the Japanese Air Force, acquired over the years as he combed through wrecked Japanese airplanes and observed Japanese pilots maneuvering in the sky. As a result, the AVG was one of the most effective units in the history of aerial warfare.²²

Chennault provided the model for the use of proprietary commercial arrangements that would be used by the newly formed CIA in the postwar period. Chennault returned to China after the war to create Civil Air Transport (CAT), an airline that became of great use to the CIA as it started to assist the anticommunist forces in China. CIA subsidized the airline, and in August 1950 bought it outright as Air America.²³

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Chennault inspecting a Civil Air Transport aircraft and embarked soldiers of the army of the Chinese Nationalists being evacuated from China in 1948. Photo © Bettmann/Corbis

Notes

1. Claire Lee Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, ed. Robert Holtz (New York: GP Putnam's Sons, 1949), 21.
2. Chennault, 22. The quoted statement is that of Maj. Gen. Walter Frank, official umpire during 1931 Air Corps maneuvers.
3. Claire Lee Chennault, *The Role of Defensive Pursuit*, available Washington, DC: Library of Congress Photoduplication Service, Call number UG630.C486, 39 pages/microfilm 85/6093 (1985).
4. Chennault, 32–33.
5. The Panay was sunk on 12 December 1937. Roy M. Stanley, *Prelude to Pearl Harbor: War in China, 1937–41* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, no date), fn on 106. Stanley notes that Chennault's "intelligence treasure" on the Panay included key parts recovered from the newest Japanese aircraft, "a fact probably known to the Japanese."
6. Chennault, 94.
7. *Ibid.*, 82.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Martha Byrd, *Chennault: Giving Wings to the Tiger* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1987). Byrd suggests Chennault had good reason for saying little about his actions, "then or later." A violation of US statutes and War Department regulations, combat would render its practitioners liable to prosecution, possibly including loss of retired officer status and pay.
10. Byrd, 117. She notes, "Although it is generally accepted (and stated by Chennault in his own memoir) that Roosevelt signed an unpublished executive order giving authority for American reserve officers and active duty enlisted men to withdraw from US service and join the AVG, no such order was signed by the president. His consent was verbal; specifics were handled by [Lauchlin] Currie, [John] Marshall, and [Frank] Knox."
11. See Timothy Castle, *One Day Too Long: Top Secret Site 85 and the Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
12. Charles R. Bond, Jr. and Terry H. Anderson, *A Flying Tiger's Diary* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1984), 214. Daniel Ford, *Flying Tigers: Claire Chennault and the American Volunteer Group* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991). Ford notes that CAMCO evidently paid \$500 bonuses to AVG pilots for 294 planes destroyed and that victories attributed to the AVG ranges from 293 to 298.
13. Edward F. Rector (AVG pilot) interview with author in *Military History*, February 2001. "The tactics Chennault taught us were what made the AVG the famous Flying Tigers." The same sentiment was voiced by the dozen or more AVG pilots the author has interviewed over the years.
14. Chennault, 257.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, 258.
18. *Ibid.*, 259.
19. See Paul Frillmann and Graham Peck, *China: The Remembered Life* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1968).
20. Frederic Wakeman Jr., *Spymaster: Dai Li and the Chinese Secret Service* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). Wakeman notes that during Dai Li's (the pinyin rendering of Tai Li) meeting with Donovan in Chungking on 2 December 1943 "Donovan said ... if OSS could not secure Dai Li's cooperation, then it

Notes (cont.)

would work on its own in China.” Dai Li responded by saying “he would kill any OSS agents operating outside SACO on Chinese soil.” The next day, Chiang Kai-shek reportedly told Donovan, “We Chinese object to a foreign secret service or intelligence service coming into China and working without the knowledge of the Chinese. Remember that this is a sovereign country and please conduct yourself accordingly.”

21. Maochun Yu, *OSS in China: Prelude to Cold War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 155. Yu writes that the name was created by Donovan aide Maj. Carl Hoffman to avoid implying any link to OSS. Hoffman told Donovan, “It was the most confused title I could think of at the moment.”

22. Byrd, 152: “The men had destroyed 297 enemy aircraft and lost only 14 of their own planes in combat.... The cost in men was four prisoners and twenty-two dead.... The cost in money was \$3 million to recruit and operate, \$8 million for planes. The US Army purchased 54 surviving planes for a credit against Lend-Lease of \$3.5 million. When the books were cleared, Chennault turned over to the Madame a remainder of \$7,990 to apply to war charity.”

23. For information about the origins of Air America and its uses after World War II see “Air America: Upholding the Airmen’s Bond” at www.foia.cia.gov/airAmerica.asp. On the site is a collection of documents revealing the role that Air America, the Agency’s proprietary airline, played in the search and rescue of pilots and personnel during the Vietnam War.

