

Lieutenant General Claire Lee Chennault of the famed Flying Tigers.

Flying Tiger honored

Wayne G. Johnson

The U.S. Postal Service recently issued a stamp honoring Flying Tiger Chief Lt. Gen. Claire Lee Chennault, thereby giving due recognition to one of America's greatest aviation tacticians.

Chennault was born in Commerce, TX, on 6 September 1893, although some military sources give his birth date as 1890. His family moved to Louisiana when he was an infant.

Clare Chennault realized his

dream to become an aviator when he won his pilot's wings in the Army Air Service in 1918. He quickly developed a reputation as an extraordinary airman, pursuit squadron leader and instructor, and by 1935 was chief of the Fighter Training Command at Maxwell Field in Montgomery, Alabama.

In 1933, as a young captain, Chennault wrote the *Role of Defensive Pursuit*, which became recognized as the authoritative manual on fighter aircraft strategy and the standard for fighter tactics in air combat.

Chennault had demonstrated the

utility of fighter aircraft in the early 1930s with his aerobatic team: *Three Men on a Flying Trapeze*, which gained him international recognition, but incurred the displeasure of his superiors.

Flying Tigers

Forced to retire in 1937, Chennault became Air Advisor to the Chinese government, and his studies of the aircraft and tactics of the Japanese invaders in China proved invaluable when the U.S. came into the war in 1941. In early 1941 he had organized the American Volunteer Group (which the Chinese later dubbed the Flying Tigers) to defend the Burma Road, the lifeline to China.

Using Chennault's innovative tactics, his Flying Tigers: The American Volunteer Group, China Air Task Force, and the 14th Air Force, blazed their way to glory over the skies of Burma and China accumulating a record of aerial victories unsurpassed by any other air units in WWII.

Because Chennault was a maverick with advanced views on fighter aircraft tactics and strategy, he was constantly in conflict with his superiors. As a result, he resigned his command in China a few months before the end of the war and thus was deprived of the taste of victory. During the V-J Day surrender ceremonies on the battleship Missouri, General Douglas MacArthur's first comment was "Where's Chennault?" MacArthur believed Chennault should be present at this important historical event because of Chennault's role in achieving that victory.

In 1946, Chennault returned to China and established the Civil Air Transport which he operated until his death.

General Claire Lee Chennault, the master aerial tactician, died in 1958, and was buried with honors at Arlington National Cemetery.

Those who had served with General Chennault felt that their commander had not received the honors he deserved and had not been given his rightful place in history. They were determined to correct that slight and felt a postal stamp honoring Claire Lee Chennault would be an appropriate recognition of his contributions to aviation. Thus began the Chennault Stamp Saga.

Campaign

The battle for the General Claire L. Chennault stamp was one of the longest campaigns in U.S. Postal history. Shortly after General Chen-

CHENNAULT ... Flying Tiger FIRST-DAY COVERS

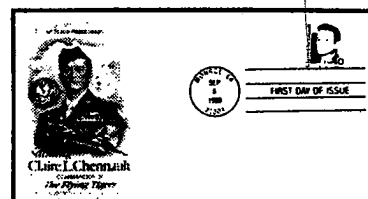
MONROE First-Day 9/6/90 \$2.50 ea. (any color) (red, blue, black).....Set of 3...\$7.00
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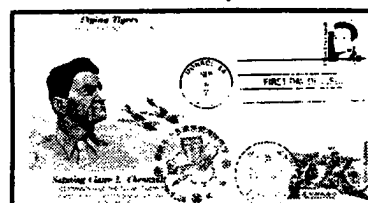
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Note: Each order comes with a colorful insert card with biography of Chennault in English & Chinese.

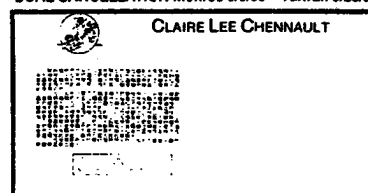
Order from: Irv Kempner, Chennault Stamp FDC Sales
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English & Chinese biography of Chennault

nault's death in 1958, Christopher Oolovgian, a Vice President of the Flying Tigers of the 14th Air Force Association, proposed a postal stamp honoring Claire L. Chennault. The Flying Tigers is a veterans' organization made up of the American Volunteer Group, the China Task Force and the 14th Air Force, commanded by General Chennault from 1941 to 1945 in China in WWII. The 14th Air Force Association was organized in 1948 by General Chennault and a number of others interested in preserving the traditions of the Flying Tigers. Chennault was the first President of the association.

Oolovgian spearheaded a letter writing program to the Post Office Department from 1960 until his death in 1972. I first wrote the Postmaster General in July 1960 and received a polite response that the Chennault Stamp would be considered. Despite thousands of requests over the years the Post Office replied with virtually the same form letter. "A Chennault stamp is being considered." We continued to write.

The campaign picked up speed in 1975 when Joseph Won of Pittsburg, CA, was appointed Chennault Stamp Committee chairman by the Board of the 14th Air Force Association. Won secured the endorsement of every member of Congress, every senator and governors of all 50 states.

Lord Louis Mountbatten, Mountbatten of Burma, President Chiang Ching-kou of Taiwan and other distinguished world and military leaders wrote letters of endorsement. Ronald Reagan as Governor of California, and later as President of the United States, strongly endorsed a Chennault Stamp. This intensive campaign failed to persuade the Postal Service.

Convention

In 1977, I was appointed chairman for the next annual convention of the Flying Tigers of the 14th Air Force to be held in Duluth, MN. I was determined to have a Chennault Stamp for that convention. But we didn't have the clout. Congressman John Blatnik and his successor, Congressman James Oberstar of Minnesota, Vice President Walter Mondale, and a number of Senators, including Ted Stevens of Alaska and Carl Levin of Michigan, arranged for personal meetings with postal officials. I met with the postal officials on five separate occasions. The Stamp "was being considered," was the stock answer.

In 1984, Warren Smith, a former

Red Cross official who had served in China with Chennault, was appointed chairman of the Chennault Stamp Committee to replace Joseph Won. Smith enlisted the aid of Herb Nickerson, a former president of the South Carolina Philatelic Society. Warren Smith intensified the efforts with a massive campaign including letters, petitions and phone calls to the Postal Service and members of the Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee. He was informed that the Advisory Committee itself was now considering a Chennault Stamp . . . but with no target date.



The man who probably tipped the scales was Senator Barry Goldwater. At the 1987 graduation ceremonies at the Air Force Academy, I discussed our inability to convince the Postal Service to issue a Chennault Stamp. Goldwater had been a transport pilot in India and China during WWII and knew and admired Chennault. He promised to help. A short time later he informed me that the Postal Service had agreed to issue a stamp honoring General Chennault in 1991.

That was still a long way away. Through the efforts of Anna Chennault, the general's widow, and Senator Ted Stevens, the issuance date was later advanced to 1990.

More than 3,000 people turned out for the First Day of Issue ceremony in Monroe, LA on 6 September 1990 at the campus of Northeast Louisiana University. A delegation from Republic of China (Taiwan), led by Ambassador Konsin Shah and Postmaster General Hsia Ho-sheng, attended the ceremonies. Postmaster General Hsia of Taiwan announced that his government was also issuing a special commemorative stamp

honoring General Claire Chennault on 26 September.

A unique feature of the ceremony was a flyover by the Louisiana Wing of the Confederate Air Force flying World War II aircraft, including the famous P-40 Warhawk fighter plane with the brilliantly colored shark's mouth on its front cowling.

The Flying Tigers celebrated their success with a Postal Service authorized Special Cancellation ceremony in New Orleans, LA on 18 October, during their 43rd annual convention. Specially designed First Day Covers, many with dual cancellations, were available at both ceremonies. In addition to the Postal Service program issued at the Monroe ceremony, the 14th Air Force Association offered a special design program at the Special Cancellation ceremony in New Orleans. Thirty years of concerted and persistent effort finally paid off. The battle was won. General Chennault now had his rightful place in history. □

Editor's note: Johnson served as a fighter pilot flying P-40s and P-51s in Chennault's command in China and is Past President of the 14th Air Force Association.

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1st DAY OF ISSUE



MEETINGS HELD WHEN TWO MEMBERS MET TOGETHER



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FIRST DAY OF ISSUE

