

GENERALS WARD & CHENNAULT & LT. HELSETH POST NO. 1 (CHINA)

THE AMERICAN LEGION

J. C. "007" BOND - COMMANDER

A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF CHINA POST 1

Part II - 1960-1989

1 JULY 1989

YEAR OF SNAKE 4687

INTRODUCTION:

This is Part II of the Pictorial History of China Post 1. The first part published last year covered the Post's illustrious past from the time it was formed in 1919 in Shanghai until the end of the Fifties. During this period and by the time the 1960's had rolled around, the United States had suffered a stock market crash, a depression in the 1930's, a second world war, a Korean conflict, and was already involved in Indo-China. There had been both hot wars and cold wars. The Post had survived it all—even its exile from China; however, the next forty plus years would prove no easier for either the country or the Post. Post Commander C.A.S. "Cash" Helseth would face numerous problems in keeping the Post alive during this turbulent period.

POST HEADQUARTERS:

In the August 1949 meeting in Hong Kong, Cash Helseth had been elected Post Commander, Adjutant, and Historian and empowered to do whatever was necessary to keep the Post alive until it could be fully reactivated in Shanghai. It was not necessary for him to be physically present in Shanghai or Hong Kong in order to maintain the Post; wherever the Commander/Adjutant was--or would be--would be considered Headquarters. Later he would jokingly say that the Post is "wherever the Commander hangs his hat." For awhile, this would be overseas; but by the 1960's Cash was living and working in California. Then in 1963, two medical setbacks, an unbelievably heavy work schedule, and a service-connected disability caused him to ask for a transfer to a less demanding position in Arizona. Upon company approval of his transfer request, he moved to Scottsdale where he and Emmy would run the Post out of their home there for close to 25 years. For a long time, they worked out of a small bedroom converted into office space but as the Post began its rapid growth in the 1970's, this became impossible. Accordingly, as soon as they were able, they built a small office in what had been their carport storage area.



Cash toasting new office space.

Later in the 1980's - due to the huge workload generated by the dramatic and continuing increase in membership and the staff require to handle it - the office would be expanded even further.



Expanded office space — 1980's.

Post Headquarters would remain in Scottsdale until 1986/1987 when Cash's health had deteriorated to the point where he felt he could no longer continue. It was then, in July 1986, that the day-to-day operation was transferred to Slidell, Louisiana with the Archives/Museum following less than a year later.

DEPARTMENT AFFILIATION:

From the time of its charter, CP#1 operated directly under American Legion Headquarters, as had other FODPALS (Foreign Operating Departments and Posts of the American Legion). However, this was to change. In June 1960, we were advised that all posts without department affiliation must effect such affiliation as soon as possible. Cash and other officers did not feel such a change would be to the benefit of the Post and relayed to National Headquarters their concerns and objections; namely, that CP#1 could lose its unique identity and that the dues increases involved might well spell the end of the Post. In addition, the Post would no longer deal directly with National Headquarters. Instead we would be responsible to a department which would act as a go-between—with all membership cards, dues, correspondence, etc., channeled back and forth through them.

THE AMERICAN LEGION
National Headquarters

Dept. of China Post No. 1 Date Rec'd 4-11-61

We acknowledge receipt of your checks in the amount
of \$3.00 in payment of 1961 National Dues
listed on Transmittals No. 4-8-61

for 2 members. Your total to date is
83. Thank you.

FRANCIS POLSEN
National Treasurer

Dealing directly with national.

In 1961, the Post was advised that there was no provision in the National Constitution for a post, which was not a part of a department. Although a number of posts had been chartered in territories and foreign countries and were not department-affiliated, the 1940 National Convention had resolved to correct this situation. WWII and the Legion's rapid expansion afterward had delayed compliance. In May 1959, the National Executive Committee passed a resolution setting forth its intention to bring about compliance. G.W. "Pat" Giele (then National Membership Director) would write, "We appreciate the problems of maintaining a Post such as yours and are grateful for the service you have rendered and are continuing to render the American Legion in doing so... However, we are still not relieved of the necessity of complying... May I urge your cooperation in effecting a prompt and voluntary affiliation with an existing department."

Although opposition continued, it became apparent we would either affiliate voluntarily with a department of our choice or be assigned to a department of National's choosing. It was decided to join a smaller department as a larger one could "swallow us up" and our identity could be destroyed. The possibility of creating a new department—the Department of the Orient—was ruled out when it was determined no new departments could be formed under the National Constitution. Since Cash was originally from North Dakota and their department was small, they were contacted but failed to respond.

As the deadline approached, a decision was made to attempt affiliation with the Department of Hawaii. In the Post's letter to Hawaii we would note, "After a considerable amount of writing and getting the considered opinions of some of the world-wide scattered membership, it is believed your Department could best serve this Post's interest in maintaining its individual history as the only Post in the world that has survived two wars, an army of occupation, internments and still exist in exile." On July 18, 1962, the Hawaii Department Commander would respond affirmatively advising we would be assigned a new Post Number, No. 43. Although National had indicated other posts in a similar position had retained their original number, Hawaii advised it was their policy to assign new numbers—in numerical sequence by date of affiliation. Our letterhead would now show us as "Generals Ward and Chennault Post No. 1 (China) – Post No. 43 – Department of Hawaii."

C. S. HELSETH
POST COMMANDER SINCE 1949
2326 NORTH 58TH STREET
SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA 85257
1962 945-3838

ADDRESS ALL COMMUNICATIONS
TO THE COMMANDER

GENERALS WARD and CHENNAULT POST NO. 1 (CHINA)
(Post No. 43, Department of Hawaii)
SHANGHAI, CHINA
Operating in Exile since 1940

New Hawaii number — New letterhead.

In business transactions with the Department we were Post 43 but in the hearts and minds of our members and friends we were still and would always be China Post 1.

In 1976, it was decided to change departments. At that time and through the able assistance of Post member and now Senior Vice Commander Marc Wood, we would begin our affiliation—still in effect today—with the Department of New York. The Post 43 designation was dropped and the New York Department accepted us as the Generals Ward and Chennault Post No. 1 (China) or China Post 1!

BUT NOT FORGOTTEN:

Post namesake Claire L. Chennault had passed in the late Fifties but he was not to be forgotten. On 14 April 1960, the Chinese unveiled his statue in New Park in Taipei, Taiwan. The Post Commander received an invitation and note from the General's widow Anna saying that her late husband would be the first foreigner to be so honored. Although Cash could not attend, another member did who would later write, "The bust of General Chennault is indeed most impressive and quite worthy of the appropriate tribute to our great friend and gallant leader. The ceremony was well attended by a large delegation of dignitaries. And of course, the unveiling honors were performed by Madame Chiang in a most impressive and memorable manner."



General Chennault Memorial - Taipei

Frank Delacy Mortimer, who during WWII so bravely hid the Post records from the Japanese at the risk of his own life, met his final call to destiny on 15 April 1969. Cash would write to his family, "Frank epitomized this Legion Post in its struggle for survival. What he did to keep us going during the Japanese occupation of China and while in internship during WWII was magnificent." Frank would die as bravely as he had lived. He would dictate a short note to Cash on 30 March 1969 and have his daughter type it. However, without her knowledge he would scribble "This is it" across the bottom of the letter before sending it off. His time had come and he was ready. His courage and dedication to the Post will remain an important part of the Post's survival and history. He will not be forgotten.

A LEGION PRESENCE:

The Post continued to maintain some sort of Legion presence even though in exile. The joint Chinese New Year dinners with American-Chinese Post 628 of Los Angeles became an annual event. At the 1960 "Year of the Mouse" dinner, CP#1 presented them with a walnut and sunray plaque "in grateful appreciation for your continuing assistance in our efforts to survive." Several Legion dignitaries attended and it would seem that the Year of the Mouse—and the decade—would start off with a roar!



Cash presenting Post 628 with plaque.

The Post Commander and his wife attended National Legion Conventions whenever possible. In 1962, Cash would again march in the parade. Since there was no color guard to identify the Post, he would stop about 2 or 3 times each block and say, "This is Free China Post No. 1 reporting in. Our members are scattered all over the world but one of us is here. The only Post in exile in Legion history we survived two wars, an army of occupation and still keep going in exile." This always drew heavy applause. Later, at a business meeting and luncheon, he would describe the "ways and means" used to keep the Post alive. He would end by introducing one of the secrets of his success, "Behind every man is the woman who does all the work. My good wife, Emmy."



Emmy Helseth - the woman behind the man.

In 1974, a loyal contingent of members, on their return to the States from the war in Southeast Asia, attended the Hawaii Department Convention in Honolulu on behalf of the Post. Two would be elected delegates to the National Convention to be held in Miami, Florida a few months later. The Post was to pick up seven Department awards based on membership. CP#1 members attending the National Convention would not only march in the parade but would ride Thai-style in a samlor (bicycle cart) through the streets of Miami. Many would be wearing Post Chinese-style outfits designed for the occasion. The crowds did not know quite what to make of it but everyone loved CP#1. They realized that this--the Post in exile from Shanghai--was something unique and special in the annals of the American Legion.

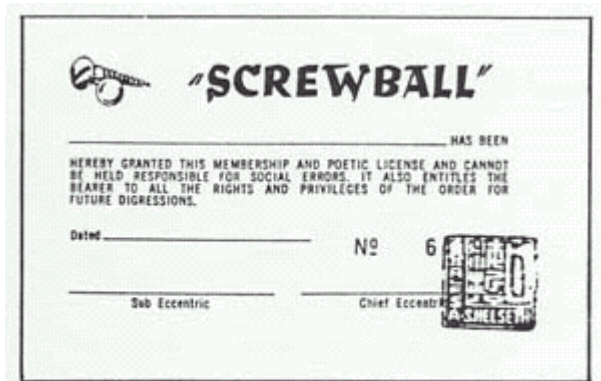
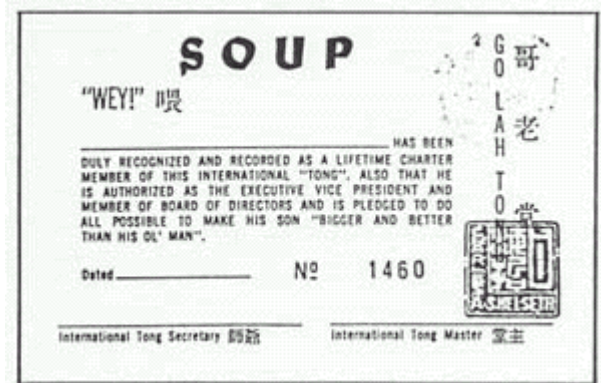


Miami parade Thai-style.

WAYS & MEANS OF SURVIVAL:

It became obvious in the 1960's that merely existing in exile was not enough. The Post must keep up the morale of a dwindling membership while also keeping the Post's name alive--to let people know what we were, who we were, and that although in exile, we should not be counted out! To do this, the Post used a number of different programs and even a few gimmicks or "conversation getters" as Cash called them. In discovering that his son had grown taller than he had, he would produce a wallet-sized "SOUP" CARD (Society for Undersized Poppas).

Then there would be a "SCREWBALL" card. An eligible screwball need only to have committed a "super colossal, bonehead, inexcusable social blunder." This card was written up in the American Legion Press Association publication and was a hot item. Everyone who read or heard about it knew not only one, but usually quite a few, qualifying screwballs--so the Post's "Soup to Nuts" program would pay off, not monetarily but as a morale booster and by keeping the Post name alive in Legion circles.



Post's "Soup to Nuts" program.

In a more serious vein, there would be the flag presentations or its membership recognition program. In PS-72 dated August 1961, Cash mentioned the possibility of a flag program whereby presentations would be made of 3x5 U.S. flags (and possibly a smaller battle flag). He hoped to obtain flags flown over the "White House" with the "Presidential Household Custodian" attesting to this via an accompanying certificate. What began as a note would become a longstanding and popular Post tradition. Over the years, flags flown over the U.S. Capitol with accompanying certificates signed by the "Architect of the Capitol" would be presented to members--and to others--for their service to their country or for helping the Post survive.

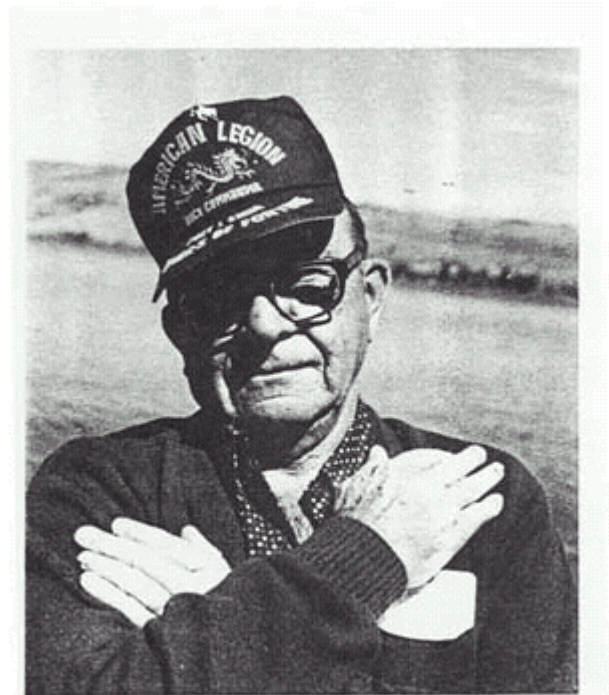
The first flags were obtained through California Congressmen; however, after the move to Scottsdale, they would be obtained through the kind auspices of Post member and Senator from Arizona, The Honorable Barry Goldwater, and his staff.



Senator Goldwater - assisted with flag program.

In 1984, Cash would send a letter of gratitude to Senator Goldwater and ask that he pass it on to the Capital's Architect, George M. White. In Mr. White's reply to Senator Goldwater he would say, "Comments like those of Commander Helseth reinforce one of the great rewards of working in the flag office--the knowledge that we are playing a role, however small, in fostering a spirit of patriotism and support for our nation's basic democratic principles."

During the 25th anniversary of the Post's operating in exile in 1974--and afterwards--many flags would be presented. The success of the program can best be noted by a letter from Edgar "Pop" Buell, the legendary American farmer who helped the H'mong tribesmen during the war in Laos. Upon receiving his flag, he would write, "I have in my time received awards. But I must say the flag I received a few nights ago at Udorn, Thailand meant more to me than any other I have ever received. Why? It was the Flag of the United States of America. In 1960, I was living in Northeast Laos working with refugees who were fleeing from the communists with nothing to eat, no place to sleep, dying like flies. I would walk from village to village with nothing to offer but myself plus a small pack on my back filled with medicine which would soon disappear. When I would get ready to leave for the next village, many people would get down on their knees, come up with their hands, and in their simple language say, 'It seems somebody cares.' To each and all of you who are members of the Generals Ward and Chennault Post No. 1 China--most of whom I know personally and who have probably done more to spread good will for the U.S. and help human beings in need than I have--I would like to say in my simple language. . . It seems somebody cares. Bless Ya All."



"Pop" Buell - a hero says thanks.

MEMBERSHIP:

After the 1949 meeting in Hong Kong, Cash Helseth--armed with a membership roster of those in the Post at time of exile--would begin his long and sometimes almost thankless job of keeping the Post alive. Each member on the roster would be encouraged to continue his membership in the "Post in Exile." Their 1949 dues would be paid out of funds still remaining in the Post treasury. But there was little else to offer them. The membership was dispersed; there was no longer a meeting place, social events, business meetings, or the ability to function as a normal Legion Post. Still they would have the Poop Sheet and be able to keep in touch with friends and former co-workers--others who had fought and served overseas. It would be the Poop Sheet that would prove to be the tie that binds.

Even so, the membership would begin a decline during the 1960's. This was due in part to Cash's inability to publish Poop Sheets on a regular basis because of work and health problems. He would advise the members that "until affairs ease up, will be lucky to get out a couple letters a year." By 1964, the membership was at an all-time low with only 56 members and he would remark, "We think this has been due to our inability to keep the Poop Sheets rolling." However, he refused to give up--and keep them rolling he did!



In the Sixties during our lowest membership years, the Okinawa Post (then the largest in the world) and a few Hawaii Department officers would feel a kinship for CP#1 and would pitch in to do what they could to keep us afloat. In addition, there remained a small but ever-loyal group of members who would stubbornly hang on. Many of these had remained in the Far East, a number with the Civil Air Transport (CAT) operation who had known and worked for Claire Chennault. They were now involved in a war in Southeast Asia and with other airlines associated with CAT at the time; namely, Southern Air Transport (SAT) and what would at one point be the world's largest airline Air America (AAM).



CAT employees kept Post name alive in Far East

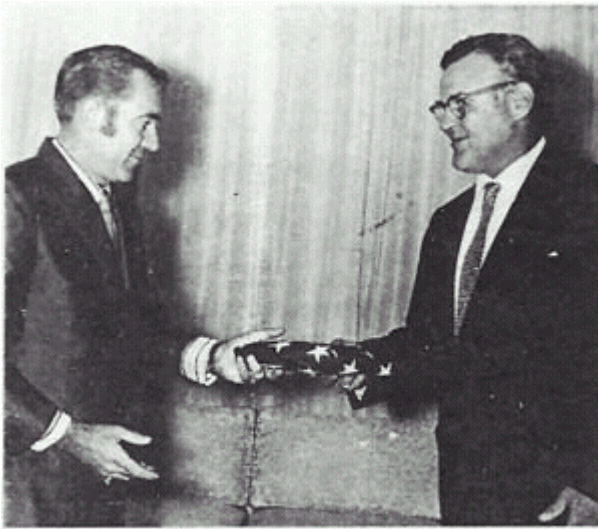
These airlines flew throughout the Far East and Southeast Asia. By the early 1970's, word of the Post would be spreading through Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, and Cambodia and membership would increase accordingly. A new era was beginning; however, there would be yet another exile in the Post's future as well.

Even when the war ended, the Post membership would continue its phenomenal growth. The conflict had produced another group of individuals who wanted to remain in contact not only with buddies and co-workers but also with others with similar wartime backgrounds and experiences. Once again, the Poop Sheet would prove to be the tie that binds, and in the late 1970's the Post would surpass its goal of 2,000 members and become what is known as a "King-sized Post."

A NEW ERA:

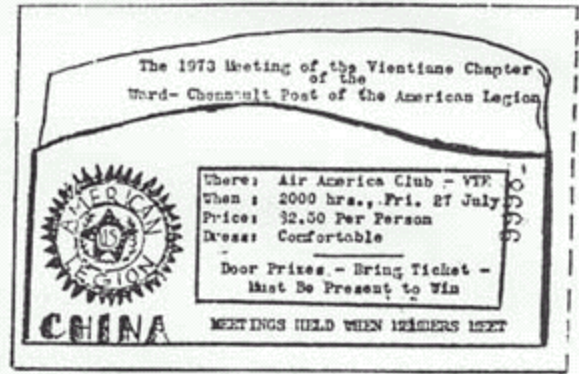
The war in Southeast Asia would have a dramatic effect on the Post. While demonstrations against the war took place in the States and the media worked at making it an “unpopular” war, those involved in helping to fight it would find a patriotic rallying point in China Post1. In late 1969, J.C. Bond was recruited for the Post in Tachikawa, Japan. In 1970, upon his transfer to Laos, he would place a notice on the Air America bulletin board describing the Post and asking those interested to contact him. No one did. On flights and ground stopovers, he was able to recruit a few others. The enthusiasm of these few would do it. They would begin a recruiting campaign both in the air and on the ground and word would spread.

The membership in Laos grew rapidly. J.C., as Executive Committeeman for the area, would arrange a flag presentation to U.S. Ambassador G. McMurtrie Godley, and the Ambassador and Mrs. Godley would host a cocktail party at their residence in honor of the event.



J.C. presents flag to U.S. Ambassador to Laos

Later in 1973, as the situation was phasing down and many were leaving Laos, J.C. would plan a meeting/buffet at the Air America Club in Vientiane. At the last minute—unable to attend himself—he would have his wife Janet host it and read his speech. In it he would note, “The Post has no club; nothing it can give a member except pride in its existence and the hope that one day we will no longer be in exile and that we’ll be around to see it! It is a fantastic way to keep in touch with friends and co-workers—through the Poop Sheet . . . So let’s keep in touch.” The response was gratifying and many at that meeting remain Post members today. Between 1970 and 1975, the membership had increased from 106 to 1190.



Laos “Chapter” holds meeting.

The Laos group was called a “Chapter” because they were a new entity within the Post. This Chapter would be the forerunner of the Divisions as we know them today. Groups were also organizing in Thailand and Vietnam, etc., and J.C. suggested to Cash a “Division” concept whereby members in different areas could meet, socialize, and—where possible—become involved in community service and charitable works. It was a unique concept for a unique Post. As the first few Divisions were formed, they were named after members killed in action. However, because there were so many KIA’s, choosing a Division name became difficult. Therefore, to honor all who had made the supreme sacrifice, the Divisions would be called “Memorial Divisions”—the name used today.



KIA Pat Thorsen’s family with banner of UDORN Division named in his honor.

As the U.S. involvement in the war was ending and the tragic evacuation of Saigon occurred, most members had already gone or were on their way home or to jobs elsewhere. But amazingly, the membership did not decline as it had after the exodus from Shanghai; it increased. Wherever members went, they would renew and recruit others. The Poop Sheet was once again the adhesive binding the membership together.

As for the Divisions, there would be more--some in the U.S. and some in overseas locations. A few would meet regularly, some only once a year, and some would go into exile from places like Iran.

For the first time, a large number of Post members would be residing in the States. This would lend itself to the creation of another Post tradition, the Annual Reunion. In 1974, two pilots based in Laos would offer to hold a Post Reunion in Pinedale, Wyoming the following year. It would be noted in PS-129 that "They are trying to set up a reunion deal for 4 July 1975. . .Don't know details but mark your calendar. They may be the start of something very worthwhile." And that it was. The Reunion took place on 4 July as scheduled. Although Pinedale was a small town, well off the beaten path, it would have the famous (infamous) Cowboy Bar and a wonderful citizenry that would welcome the Post. The Reunion was such a success, Cash would send a letter for publication in the "Pinedale Roundup" which would "express appreciation to the community and citizen of Pinedale for their hospitality during our recent reunion - Also at the same time to help honor native sons of this Wyoming area who inspired it: Charles 'Chuck' Taylor, Wayne Landen, and Henry 'Hank' Edwards." After Pinedale, it was taken for granted here would be other reunions. They would be held in different areas so that all Post members no matter where they lived would at one time or another have the opportunity to attend.



Pinedale - "They would never believe that crap in the Cowboy Bar!"

CONTINUED SURVIVAL:

As the membership grew, the volume of paper and administrative work would increase proportionately. The workload would be impossible for Cash and Emmy to handle alone and they would hire a small staff of hourly-paid employees to help. Business concepts required to handle such a rapidly expanding organization would also be implemented to include incorporation in 1976. In addition, an appropriate Constitution and By-Laws would be developed. In forwarding these documents to the membership, Cash would note, "It was a heck of a job to marry the National/Department/our own Headquarters and the Divisions and preserve the integrity of all. Also to provide for legal technicalities of incorporating too. Gawd only knows the sweat and time which went into that. But it is done."

In 1976, the membership--wanting to honor Cash for his many years of dedicated service--decided to rename the Post to include his name upon his meeting "The Final Qualification." Cash was overwhelmed when told but did manage to remark that he hoped to put off that distinction (final qualification) as long as possible!



Plans to delay final qualification as long as possible!

In 1980, Cash discovered he had cancer, slow moving but incurable. His heart problems would complicate treatment. The doctors felt he could live a number of years--but there were no guarantees. What would happen to the Post? For over 30 years, he had run it; could it survive without him? He realized to ensure its survival, decisions would have to be made and implemented while he was still in fairly good health. He contacted then Deputy Commander J.C. Bond who would make a commitment that when Cash could no longer continue, he and Janet would do whatever was necessary to keep the Post going.

Cash would seek advice from Co-Chairman of the Executive Board Martin Kaufman, among others, on how best to preserve continuity should something happen to him. Accordingly, a plan for succession was drawn up which Cash would forward to the members in the form of a ballot and ask that they vote for or against it. The vote in favor of the plan was overwhelming with less than 25 votes against.

By 1985, the cancer that had been somewhat in remission began to spread and at the 1985 Reunion, he would advise the Executive Board and the membership in attendance that he could no longer continue. He agreed to remain on as Commander and oversee the Museum activity; however, he could no longer function as Adjutant and that part of the operation would have to be moved.

Because he had actively assisted and advised Cash for a number of years--and in recognition of his hard work and dedication to the Post--J.C. Bond became Deputy Commander in 1974. In 1986, realizing Cash could no longer go on--and honoring the commitment he and Janet had made to keep the Post alive--they would offer to move the operation to their home in Louisiana. Janet would return to the States, go to Arizona to learn the Post operation and then move it to Slidell.



The Bond's - new Post Headquarters in Slidell

By the October 1986 Reunion in Florida, Cash was undergoing further radiation and would be unable to attend. He would ask that he be relieved as Commander of the Post and become Commander Emeritus on 30 June 1987. Further, he requested that the approved succession plan be implemented. This was accomplished and by a unanimous vote Janet would remain Adjutant and J.C. Bond would become Commander with Alfred G. Plat Deputy Commander effective 1 July 1987.

On 22 November 1987, Cash Helseth met his final call to destiny. For over 40 years and against all odds he and his wife Emmy had kept China Post 1 going. Had it not been for these years of hard work and dedication, there would not be a Post today. As a final farewell to Cash, the Post would hold a Post Everlasting Ceremony for him at its 1988 Ft. Walton Beach Reunion. Having met his "final qualification," the Post would be renamed the Generals Ward & Chennault & Lt. Helseth Post No. 1 (China). The quotation, "A flame kindled by human decency, courage, and dedication does not die" applies to Cash Helseth. This flame endures in China Post 1.

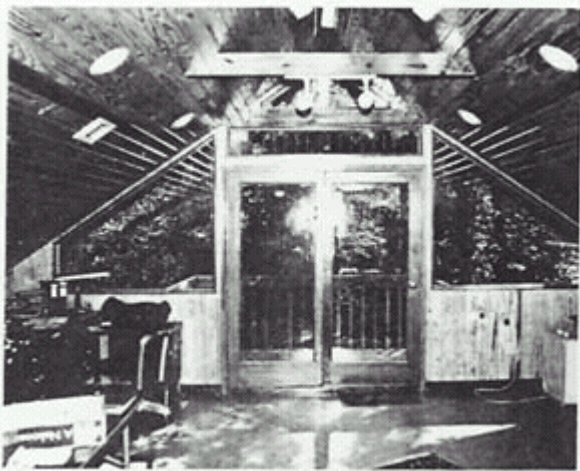


Post Everlasting Ceremony for former Commander Helseth



THE POST TODAY:

The Post is alive and well in Louisiana. However, getting it to this point was not easy. Janet, with the help of son Tim, literally and figuratively moved the everyday operation of the Post in July 1986. They drove a 21-foot Ryder truck loaded with office gear, paperwork, files, and other materials from Arizona to Louisiana. It was a long, hard trip. There had not been time to set up any kind of office in Slidell, so they would unload the truck, unpack as many boxes as possible, and immediately start to work processing memberships in the living-room of the house. The 1987 membership year had begun and there was already a backlog of renewals, new membership applications, and emblem sales orders to fill--plus 60 to 70 letters and renewals arriving daily. In addition, there were a thousand and one details to handle including the establishment of the business procedures required to operate in Louisiana. Because of the volume of work and the monumental amount of paper, etc., it was immediately evident that a living-room operation was not feasible. Accordingly, J.C. and Janet would immediately renovate their home by adding an office to handle Post activities.



Slidell office shortly after construction.

Later, they would also renovate the garage to accommodate the storage of the Museum items. In May 1987, Deputy Commander Platt would travel to Scottsdale to arrange and ship the Museum material to Slidell where it is presently stored.



Garage renovation to properly store museum items.

Since moving the Post activities to Slidell, the membership has been sustaining well. Our Ladies Auxiliary, which was established in 1979, has been going strong with a small but continued increase in members over the years since its formation. The Museum and Brick Fund Donations--dedicated for the establishment of our Post Home/Museum--have been good and none of these funds have ever, nor will they, be used for any purpose other than that for which they were donated. It is hoped that our Post Home/Museum, which began as a dream, will sometime in the not too distant future become a reality

So even though the Post has had more than its share of problems since the move, there have been both continuity and survival. Conventional Legion Post we are not--nor can we be. We are unique with a unique set of problems. But we have the finest group of members any Legion Post has ever had--or ever will have. They have been supportive and loyal through all our trials and tribulations. With a membership like ours, China Post 1 should be able to survive whatever the future may have in store.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

This Pictorial was compiled to give the members a brief but better understanding of the Post's history and traditions. It was not meant to be an in-depth study by any means. There were far too many people to name who have helped the Post over the years and who are a part of this history. Therefore, we plan next year to publish a Pictorial on some of these good folks and the contributions they have made to both our history and survival. We feel this will be the best way to give them the recognition they deserve. We will add to this in future publications and will also do a Pictorial on our Divisions--both past and present. We should take pride in our history and the people who have made the Post what it is today. Our history is ongoing as we hope the Post will be--may we, in fact, go on forever!

END OF PART II - PICTORIAL HISTORY 1960-1989

*Compiled by Janet Bond
from material in Post Archives*

A BACKWARD GLANCE



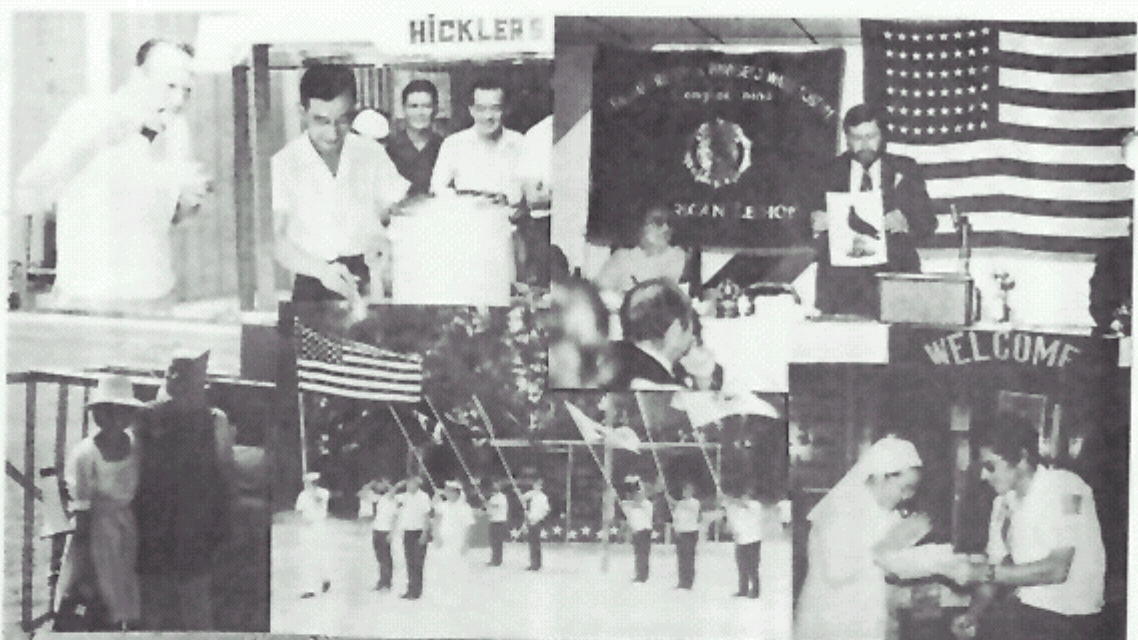
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CHINA POST 1

