

THE CITATION FOR THE PRESIDENT'S
CORPORATE EXCELLENCE AWARD

China National Aviation Corporation

1933 to 1949

for Pre-eminent Achievements In The Annals Of Asian Aviation

In the 1930s, the global aviation industry was still in its infancy. The aeroplane was just invented by the American Wright Brothers in 1903.

The Italians were the first to use the airplane in 1911 for its military campaigns during the Italian-Turkish war. In the history of civil aviation, the first commercial flight occurred in 1914, a twenty-three minute flight between Tampa and St. Peterburg in USA.

Chinese aviation really began when the first aeroplane was introduced into China in 1911 by a Guangdong native, Feng Ru 馮如 better known by the Americans as “Joe Fong” who was also a part of the Chinese diaspora in the USA. In China, it was Feng Ru who commenced a plan to develop the aviation business and to establish a flight team for the Chinese government.

Against the backdrop of such momentous events, it was inevitable that China too would begin its own civil and commercial aviation industry. It was only in the 1930s with the formation of the China National Aviation Transport Corporation that marked the beginning of a period of continuous and par excellence contributions to Chinese aviation development.

In the early days of 1930s, China was still a fractious country with Nationalist Kuomintang government ruled the eastern portion of China, whilst the Chinese warlords and the Communists influenced the interior regions of the country.

The China National Aviation Corporation was formed in 1929 as a joint venture airline operated by Curtiss-Wright and the Chinese Nationalist government. Pan-Am took over from Curtiss-Wright in 1933.

During that year, CNAC expanded its operations to include the whole of China. Consequently, CNAC was seen as an influencing factor in unifying the increasingly fractious China. CNAC was the major airline in China. For an example, a DC-2 aircraft could fly from Chengdu to Chongqing, in two hours.

During the pioneering years of CNAC, besides the significant commercial flights between the Chengdu-Chongqing Route, there were the flights between the Shanghai-Beijing Route. There were also flights to Rangoon in Burma (the present-day Myanmar) and Hanoi, the capital of French Indo-China (1,760 km north of the present-day, Ho Chi Minh City) in Vietnam.

What were the types of planes used by CNAC? The corporation was a pioneer to use the Loening Seaplane. The Loening Seaplane was one of the first of the "shoehorn-float" civilian aircraft that could land and float on sea water. The CNAC also had in its repertoire, aircrafts such as the Stinson, the Douglas Dolphin, Sikorsky S-38 and the variety of DC classes of planes.

The CNAC made its most pre-eminent contributions to Asian aviation in general and to the Chinese aviation in particular, during the ensuing war years of 1938 to 1945. The most significant CNAC's contributions occurred during this period of history. It was its active involvement in the struggle against the Japanese military invaders into China.

When the World War spread to China, CNAC personnel were pressed into service to fly supplies and personnel to areas cut off by the enemy from land routes. Because of the ongoing war with Japan, it became evident by the early 1940 that an alternate supply routes into China would be required. A new air base would have to be at or near a seaport, river-port or railhead.

Moreover, the distance into China would have to be within range of the CNAC's aircrafts and sufficiently enough for economic operations. The

new air base had to be relatively secure from Japanese attack; it had to be in a country which would permit CNAC to effectively function.

The CNAC pilots pioneered the world-famous “Hump” route, the last link in the world’s longest military supply line, which extended from India to China. It commenced its headquarters base in India during the war. The CNAC pilots transported supplies and personnel from Assam, India, into Yunnan, southwestern China through the Himalayas better known as the Hump Route, after the Japanese military blockaded all the lands access.

Many CNAC pilots such as Captain Gordon Pan Guoding valiantly aided and supported the “Flying Tigers” in the defence of China. Captain Pan was a mere civilian pilot who performed over five hundred sorties between Calcutta to Kunming over the “Hump” throughout the war years.

The CNAC pilots contributed significantly to the rescue missions too; recovering and evacuating civilians and military personnel from distress areas to safety. Among the pilots who conducted rescue missions, one was Captain Chin Moon Fun. Captain Chin conducted rescue mission military personnel he daringly rescued, was Lt Col James Dolittle who led the USAF squadron in the bombing of Tokyo following the attack on Pearl Harbour in 1942.

The civilian rescue missions were by no means less dangerous and risky than the military operations. The risks and sacrifices undertaken by the CNAC pilots contributed tremendous to the defence of China and eventually, contributed to the defeat of the Japanese imperial armed forces in Asia.

After the war had ended, CNAC returned to its base in China, to Shanghai. The post war years of 1945 to 1949 witnessed the continuing significant contributions of CNAC and its pilots toward the development of civil aviation in China. For an example, by 1947, CNAC pilots were able to fly the aircrafts from Shanghai to San Francisco in a mere 40 hours

The corporation had grown into a huge organization with thousands of employees assigned to various departments such as transportation,

finance, technical, medical, catering and administration, that continued to impact the civil aviation industry after the war.

The CNAC ceased its operations in 1949 following the dawn of a new political era on mainland China. With its demise, the final contribution was to the development of its successor, the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

In a nutshell, although the history of CNAC was brief, the historical contributions of CNAC were undeniable. Moreover, the achievements of CNAC were inseparable from the accomplishments of its distinguished crops of pilots who piloted the CNAC planes as well as the many contributions of the countless CNAC employees and as such, had a pre-eminent influence on Asian Aviation in general and Chinese Aviation in particular.

Hence, the President's Corporate Excellence Award is awarded to CNAC for:

Pre-eminent Achievements In the Annals of Asian Civil Aviation

- 1 Pioneer in Civil Aviation in China;
- 2 Pioneer Flights Over The Hump Route;
- 3 Contributions To China's WWII Defence and
4. Contributions To The Development Of Civil Aviation In Asia

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