

The Truth at Last: How Nixon Beat Humphrey

by Russell Warren Howe & Sarah Hays Trott

Today, the best-known "China lobby" name associated with Chiang Kai-shek is Anna Chan Chennault. Mrs. Chennault, a woman of strong will and convictions, was a 23-year-old Catholic journalist when she married 56-year-old General Claire Chennault in 1947. The father of eight children who divorced his wife of 35 years to marry Anna, Chennault was a former stunt pilot who became the dashing commander of the Flying Tiger Squadron of American fighter pilots which helped Chiang fight the Japanese early in World War II. (When the United States entered the war, the "Tigers" were incorporated into the U.S. Army Air Corps.) After their marriage, Chennault lived with Anna on Taiwan and fathered two more children, while running the local airline CAT (Civil Air Transport). Mrs.

Chennault—Peking-born and educated in Hong Kong—became a U.S. citizen in 1950.

When the general died of lung cancer in his hometown, New Orleans, in 1958, his widow sold CAT to a CIA-front corporation and moved to the Washington social scene the following year. She became vice president for international relations of Flying Tiger Airline (now Flying Tiger International), the freight line then run by one of the general's former pilots, Robert Prescott.

A trim, Oriental mixture of assertion and charm, Mrs. Chennault tours Asian capitals every two months or so for Flying Tiger, and has acted as a conduit between right-wing Asian leaders and GOP administrations. Her main Asian associations in recent years, apart from Chiang (Mrs. Chiang is godmother to the two Chennault daughters), have been former President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam, President Fernando Marcos of the Philippines, and President Park Chung Hee of South Korea.

In the Kennedy era, her lavish

Russell Warren Howe and Sarah Hays Trott are Washington writers. This article is adapted from their book, The Power Peddlers, to be published by Doubleday & Company, Inc. Copyright © 1976 Russell Warren Howe and Sarah Hays Trott.

apartment, tastefully furnished in Chinese *objets d'art*, was a chandeliered watering hole for top Republicans and a sprinkling of Democrats. Even the reclusive J. Edgar Hoover came. She raised funds for Nixon in 1960 and proceeded to raise more for Goldwater in 1964. In 1968, she became co-chairman (with Mamie Eisenhower) of Women for Nixon-Agnew, chairman of the Republican Women's National Finance Committee, and a vice chairman of the Republican National Finance Committee. She raised a quarter-million dollars for the campaign by calling friends and refusing to accept anything less than \$500.

Nixon's indebtedness to Mrs. Chennault and her friends went back to before 1960. It was China lobby funds that helped him in his first, successful fight for a congressional seat against Helen Douglas. In 1967, a year before being elected President, Nixon, as attorney for Pepsi-Cola, had an interview with Chiang—thoughtfully set up by Anna—that led to Coca-Cola being refused a permit to

establish in Taiwan, in competition with Pepsi. Nixon returned the favor, in his way, in 1971, by accepting Chiang's and Chennault's advice over that of Secretary of State William Rogers and deciding against establishing an embassy in Outer Mongolia, a Soviet-dominated republic claimed by Chinese of all political hues as part of Chinese territory. Another factor entering into the Outer Mongolia decision, of course, was that Nixon was seeking not to irritate Mao: 1971 was the year that Henry Kissinger began preparing the terrain for detente with Communist China.

In the week of the first Nixon inaugural, *The Washington Post* society columnist Maxine Cheshire wrote about Chennault under the headline: "Next Perle Mesta?" In that early Nixon era, before Watergate became notorious, Chennault's \$175,000 duplex in the luxury complex of that name regularly entertained such famous figures as John and Martha Mitchell, GOP Senators Barry Goldwater, William Saxbe, Jesse Helms, and Strom Thurmond, House

Minority Leader Gerald Ford, and Kissinger himself. One of Kissinger's dates, Johnson cocktail-circuit hold-over Barbara Howar, was not welcome, however. Familiars of both say Chennault and Howar have too many of the wrong things in common to tolerate each other's presence.

The Vietnam Connection

In the 1968 campaign, Chennault played a critical role, in part revealed by an FBI wiretap on the South Vietnamese embassy in Washington. The October 30 wiretap showed that Chennault passed word to President Thieu, through his ambassador, Bui Diem, that Thieu should not go to the Paris peace talks—scheduled to start the following week—with the U.S. delegation to be led by special envoy Averell Harriman. Thieu didn't go, and the conference never got under way. Prospects for the talks had seemed reasonably good until Thieu failed to show up. Johnson had called a bombing halt, and, as Harriman has since revealed, the North Vietnamese had made substantial troop withdrawals as a demonstration of good faith.

Chennault's aim was clearly to insure that Nixon's rival, Vice President Hubert Humphrey, would not gain an electoral advantage from a truce and the promise of peace. When the FBI passed the wiretap transcript to Johnson, the President flew into an understandable rage and informed Humphrey of what had happened.

Humphrey was angered by the Chennault stratagem, which may even have violated the so-called Logan (or Neutrality) Act, which makes it a felony, punishable by up to three years' imprisonment, for a citizen to have "intercourse with any foreign government... with intent to influence [its] conduct... in relation to any disputes or controversies with the United States, or to defeat the measures of the United States."

Former Humphrey press secretary Norman Sherman recalls the event:

"I came into Humphrey's [vice presidential] office and saw Humphrey and Ted [campaign aide Ted Van Dyk] sitting together in an excited conversation. They had just gotten the word from the White House that Anna Chennault had been in touch with the Vietnamese government. She had told them not to go to the peace talks—that they would get a better deal from Nixon.

"I asked Humphrey what he wanted me to do with the story. I wanted to blast Richard Nixon. But Humphrey said he didn't have the evidence. Cartha DeLoach had it." (DeLoach was a top aide to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.) "Also," Sherman recalls, "it would have been difficult to explain how we knew about what she had done."

Humphrey was concerned about revealing that the FBI regularly tapped embassies. Not until December 1975 did government lawyers admit in a civil suit that such taps were made and were seen as essential to the collection of intelligence. Senate Intelligence Committee hearings the month before showed that the South Vietnamese embassy tap, and physical surveillance of Chennault in Washington and New York, was ordered by President Johnson himself, with DeLoach bringing the information to the National Security Council's executive secretary, J. Bromley Smith.

Humphrey sent former FDR Assistant Attorney General James Rowe—himself an erstwhile, business-oriented foreign lobbyist—to see Thieu's envoy and protest. But Humphrey accepted Nixon's own protestations of ignorance of the Chennault maneuver; and when Nixon sent the then Senate minority leader, Everett Dirksen, to the embassy to dissociate the Republican Party's candidate from Chennault's action, Humphrey agreed not to raise the issue in the campaign.

Thieu's decision not to go to Paris came five days before the election. Just as the polls were showing Humphrey catching up with and in some cases even passing Nixon, Humphrey's



Anna Chennault

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momentum was arrested by the disappointment that yet another prospect for peace in Vietnam seemed to be going down the drain. In Saigon, Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker—who had relayed to Washington Thieu's earlier promise to attend the talks—fumed, as did Harriman in Paris. When a report of Chennault's intervention surfaced the following March in a column by Jack Anderson—who once worked with Anna Chennault in Chinese refugee relief just after World War II—a Nixon cabinet member, Robert Finch, told reporters that anything she had done had been on her own initiative. Theodore White charged later that Chennault had recruited Chiang and Korean President Park also to lean on Thieu to support her advice. Democrats were in an uproar, but Chennault of course denied everything, telling one reporter: "It makes me feel that the men who were defeated are trying to hide behind a woman's skirts."

What Nixon Did

In 1974, Mrs. Chennault told the writers archly that "whatever I did during the campaign, the Republicans, including Mr. Nixon, knew about." In 1975, on being informed that the FBI transcript might be available under the Freedom of Information Act, she acknowledged the whole story, adding that the transcript showed that "from the very first conversation I made it clear that I was speaking for Mr. Nixon, and it is clear that the ambassador was only relaying messages between Mr. Nixon and Mr. Thieu. We did nothing but relay messages."

The following interchange then took place:

Question: "So Mr. Nixon asked you to relay to President Thieu that he should hold off on coming to Paris and wait until the election was over?"

Chennault: "Yes, but all I did was relay Mr. Nixon's message and then the ambassador [of South Vietnam] relayed President Thieu's back to me so that I could tell Mr. Nixon."

Question: "But Mr. Nixon had Senator Dirksen tell Vice President Humphrey that he [Nixon] knew nothing about any initiative to stop President Thieu from attending the peace conference."

Chennault: "Well, the President decided to say that, and I am only a woman and a member of a minority so how could I say the President was a liar? And how could the [South Vietnamese] ambassador say the President was a liar?"

Not every lobbyist can claim to have perhaps elected a President—and given the United States Watergate and six more years of the Vietnam war. Harriman gallantly says today that Thieu might have worked out the tactic of helping Nixon by not going to Paris, even without Chennault's advice. But Harriman notes also that the bombing halt had given Humphrey a "shot in the arm" and that, if negotiations had started, "I am satisfied, myself, that Humphrey would have won." ■

How the Condor Was Killed

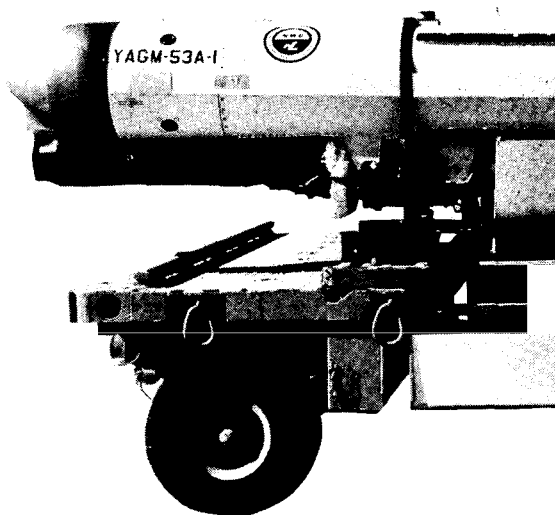
by Greg Rushford

Late last summer, Congress killed a major Defense Department weapons project, the Condor missile. It was a rare case, one of the few times the Pentagon hasn't gotten what it wanted from Congress, and it came about through a curious, unofficial combination of circumstances. But those circumstances make up more than just an isolated once-in-a-lifetime case of beating city hall; they also point toward a new way by which Congress might be able to evaluate—really evaluate—defense programs and maintain reasonable control over the Pentagon.

The Condor missile was conceived in the Navy's laboratories at China Lake, California in the early 1960s by scientists in search of what they liked to call a "smart bomb." On paper, it sounded terrific. The missile would be fired from an airplane a safe distance (60 miles) from its target. Its course would be guided by someone on the plane who could watch it on a television screen. The missile would be so accurate that it could be shot through any designated window of a building.

But the Condor didn't work out. It turned out to be usable only on clear days—its television-screen guidance system needed high visibility to function, and even in good weather, an enemy could obscure its targets with

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smoke. The new missile was relatively easy to track and shoot down. Its warhead was too small to destroy major targets. Comparable Navy and Air Force weapons were far less costly.

It was natural, then, that opposition to the Condor began to take shape even before initial testing was completed. By the late 1960s, a group of civilians in the Pentagon, supported by some Navy officials who were concerned about Condor's poor test results and unsuitability for combat, wanted to kill the missile. In December 1970, the General Accounting Office, Congress' investigative arm, warned of Condor's problems in a report to the Senate Armed Services