

Synopsis

“Preemptive Strike--The Secret Plan that Would Have Prevented the Attack on Pearl Harbor”

Before Japan began developing its plan for a preemptive strike on the American Pacific Fleet anchored at Pearl Harbor, Claire Chennault, a retired Air Corps officer working as a mercenary pilot and adviser to the Chinese Aeronautical Commission, presented a plan to launch firebombing raids on the Japanese home islands. Chennault's plan was presented to Treasury Secretary, Henry Morgenthau, Jr., a man with close ties to President Roosevelt. Shortly before the plan was presented, Dr. T.V. Soong, China's Special Envoy to America, and Morgenthau had lunch at the White House with President Roosevelt. Roosevelt had previously commented to Morgenthau, “It would be a nice thing if China bombed Japan.”

Chennault's plan was to employ American planes flown by American crews to bomb Japan, operating from secret air bases in southeastern China. A special airfield for the bombers was built in Kweilin near adjoining mountains with operations facilities designed to be bomb proof. A forward airfield in Chuchow was only 700 miles from Kyushu. It would be a Chinese Air Force in name only and would be financed with American funds “loaned” to China during a time when the American Neutrality Law would not “officially” authorize the operation of an American guerrilla air force in China as a “commercial venture,” without any direct ties to the United States Government.

What was called the American Volunteer Group (later known as *The Flying Tigers*), had to be formed with the utmost secrecy. Charles Lindbergh had publicly opposed Roosevelt's interventionist efforts in Europe and had the support of influential business leaders and intellectuals. Substantial numbers of Americans turned out to hear Lindbergh's addresses at *America First* rallies. Lindbergh also made a number of nationwide radio addresses advocating a foreign policy of isolationism.

Although officially postponed on December 22, 1940, Chennault's plan was resurrected by Roosevelt's Aide, Dr. Lauchlin Currie on May 12, 1941, and endorsed by President Roosevelt as “Joint (Army/Navy) Board 355, Serial 691” on July 23, 1941.

The Japanese knew that an American guerilla air force was secretly training in the jungles of Burma, a British colony, during the fall of 1941 and had a spy close to Chiang Kai-shek's government. The American press disclosed the existence of this guerilla air force as well as American plans to bomb Japan. Sixty-six American bombers were in the process of being delivered to China to serve under Chennault's command. In addition to the American Volunteer Group initiative, on November 21, 1941, American Army Air Force strategists were selecting targets in Japan to be attacked by Air Force heavy bombers in the Philippines.

This work investigates America's plans to launch preemptive bombing raids on Japan *before* Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. The author suggests that had Chennault's plan been timely implemented, Japan would have been occupied in a defensive air war and would have been unlikely to have launched its attack on Pearl Harbor. The author also asks the reader to consider when it is appropriate for America to employ military force preemptively in the wake of the terrorist attacks on American soil of September 11, 2001.