Wings & Things Guest Lecture Series

Black Bats

British author Chris Pocock discusses the "Black Bats" and CIA spy flights over China from Taiwan from 1951-1969.

I'm very pleased to be back here and thank you, General Metcalf, for inviting me. I always feel I'm back here with friends. It's really great to be back here. Yes, I'm known as the sort of unofficial U-2 historian, but I'm not going to talk about the U-2 tonight, only in passing. Instead I'm going to talk about an airplane, or rather a project that you've probably never really heard of, except for one person in the audience.

I'd like to consider this the last great untold spy plane story of the Cold War. It's a U.S. sponsored program which did 585 overflights of Communist territory in 14 years, during the Cold War, in which over a 100 aircrew lost their lives, in which a B-17 was flown over denied territory once for 19 hours, in which the aircraft that succeeded the B-17 in this project was capable of five different missions – electronic intelligence, communications intelligence, nuclear sampling, photo and radar imaging, and dropping agents and propaganda. This aircraft was flown by Poles and Czechs and Chinese, as well as by Americans. In fact, it was mostly flown by Poles and Czechs and then Chinese. This is an airplane, possibly the only one – although I stand to be corrected by a knowledgeable audience – that had a U.S. designation but never actually served in the U.S. Air Force. And, so yes, it's the Black Bat squadron, a joint venture, effectively, between the U.S. and Taiwan, and specifically between the Central Intelligence Agency and the Republic of China Air Force. I'll probably call it the Chinese Air Force tonight because that's what it was called at the time, in the days when the U.S. recognized Taiwan as the legitimate government of China, albeit in exile.

The squadron number was the 34th and the motto and their patch, which you'll see in a minute, was a black bat because they flew at night. That was the operation over China and there was another operation over Vietnam which extends the history of this squadron through to 1972, starting with B-17s and then this unique modification of the Navy's P2V Neptune, which was given the U.S. Air Force designation RB-69.

There is the air base they flew out of on the west coast of Taiwan and then in Vietnam they flew C-123s, all of these airplanes provided by the U.S. and actually remaining U.S. property.

This is what they did, and this is their patch flying by the Big Dipper at night and this is the Red Curtain that they penetrated. That is the symbology that the Chinese designed themselves in about the fifth year of this operation.

It was a covert operation and certainly the U.S. wanted it to remain a covert operation, but the Nationalists in Taiwan couldn't resist publicizing it because, for them, part of the rationale for

having such a squadron was to assert their right to fly over the mainland even though they were the government in exile now, having been evicted from the mainland, having lost the civil war with the Communists in 1949. I've already been through the main roles and as far as the U.S. was concerned, it became increasingly a SIGINT operation rather than an agent and propaganda operation. And towards the end, as China began to develop its own nuclear weapon, which it first exploded in 1964, just before then this squadron also did nuclear sampling.

To set the context, it was one of a number of joint projects between the U.S. and Taiwan, of which I have written about the Black Cats, the U-2 project. That started in '62 and lasted until 1974, and that was, of course, daylight, high-altitude photo. But there were other projects. There was a cooperative low-level photo recon mission, which was flown in the fast technical jets, and they would fly along the mainland coast, flying out of Taiwan, penetrating as far as they could obviously in terms of their range, nothing like as great as the U-2, which went a long way inland, as did the Black Bats … a major ground base signals intelligence operation also which was run by the Air Force Security Service and the National Security Agency.

This all started, as I'll explain a little more, with Civil Air Transport, which was for a long while in the '50s and '60s the flag-carrying airline of Taiwan, which was actually owned by the CIA. It was an airline that had been created on the mainland but had fallen on hard times and was actually bought by the agency in 1950 through a proprietary company and thereafter led a double life as Taiwan's legitimate passenger carrying airline but also doing covert missions for the CIA. Western Enterprises, the WEI, was the cover company for a range of CIA operations in Taiwan in the early part of the '50s, which included attempts to land agents and create problems for Communist China all along the coast opposite Taiwan.

The politics of all this is quite interesting, of course. Chiang Kai-shek, the Generalissimo, the leader of the Nationalists, that was his slogan – "Back to the Mainland!" – and everything he could do to assert that right to go back, he would sign up to. The U.S. policy, I call it equivocation because the U.S. needed Taiwan. They realized this during the Korean War when China entered the Korean War and proved an unexpectedly formidable foe there, and realized that Taiwan could be used as an attempt to draw Chinese attention away from Korea, but the U.S. policy was never fully supporting Chiang Kai-shek and his ambitions. For instance, under the Truman administration, he did not allow or sanction any military operations by the Nationalists against the mainland. Now when President Eisenhower came into power in '53-'54, he lifted this ban, but privately U.S. officials told Chiang Kai-shek they would not approve any large-scale attack against the mainland that might draw the U.S. into a war with China. This policy was formalized in a mutual defense treaty between the U.S. and Taiwan in December 1954 and that treaty lasted until the Nixon opening to China. That treaty was finally ended, I think, in 1978.

Many of you may have heard of the first Taiwan Straits Crisis in July and October '58 when it seemed that Mao Tse-tung was mobilizing to move against the island of Taiwan and bombarded the two remaining islands close to Taiwan, Gemoi and Matsu, which Taiwan had retained. A second Taiwan Straits Crisis, less well known, in June '62, again when intelligence indicators were that the Chinese were seriously interested in assaulting Taiwan.

Finally on the politics, as in other theaters, other regions, a difference between the CIA and the State Department, which comes out in a lot of the declassified documents – the CIA were very important in Taiwan, especially in the '50s because, practically speaking, the station chief was far more important than the ambassador. So the origins of what I'm talking about was CAT, Civil Air Transport. This was the airline's first C-54, DC-4 airliner, and they flew C-46s, a C-54, and a B-17 over the mainland from Taiwan during the Korean War, dropping agents. While they were doing that with American aircrew, supported by recruiting the first Chinese co-pilots into CAT, the Chinese Air Force itself started a night photo operation with a couple of specially modified B-52s using photo flash bombs in 1952.

The situation changed dramatically in November '52 when a C-47 provided by CAT that was flying agent dropping and recovery missions out of Korea over Manchuria was shot down. Five American aircrew, three of them were killed. Two of them, the kickers in the back, the two guys that were throwing out the bundles of leaflets and making sure the Chinese agents left the plane correctly, they survived and were captured and they were held in China for something like 20 years. Although American aircrew that were captured by North Korea and China during the Korean War were repatriated after the war, these two were not. Actually the U.S. government did not officially acknowledge them and so the Chinese government said well you're not acknowledging them, therefore we're keeping them.

So that led to a new policy, it seems, from President Truman that if we're going to do this flying over mainland China, let's get the Chinese to do it. So the CAF Special Mission Group was formed in 1953, predecessors to what became the Black Bats, and two B-17s were provided and they moved into Hsinchu Air Base in June 1953 and the unit shortly thereafter acquired a couple of B-26s. The B-17s flew long-range missions, dropping agents. The B-26s majored on leaflet dropping. They were fast and went in low level at night. They did drop agents as well. The agents were carried prone in the bomb bay and were ejected by simply opening the bomb bay. But they didn't do much of that. The B-17 was the best airplane for dropping agents out of, so these planes did leaflet dropping and a typical flight flown by this crew in February 1954 was actually daylight flight over Shanghai. This was mainland China's Sino-Soviet Friendship Day and so it was decided that this squadron would spoil the party, or spoil the day as it were, flying down Main Street Shanghai, dropping propaganda leaflets, reminding the people of mainland China that they were effectively subservient to the Soviet Union. These airplanes were flown up until 1959.

Here are some examples of the leaflets. These are actual examples of the leaflets that were dropped during these missions:

Here is Chiang Kai-shek, and this is a Chinese New Year message urging cooperation amongst the anti-Communist fighters.

Here's a leaflet which is criticizing the personality cult which was developing around Mao Tse-tung.

I think the next one is fairly self-explanatory.

Finally, the one on the left says it's only a matter of time before China's true government returns. There's the 12-pointed star of the Nationalists.

The one on the right is actually rather rude in Chinese, but it effectively says that the blood debt will be repaid by blood.

Here are a couple of maps which show the typical missions that were flown by the B-17s in the 1950s. In fact, the one on the left shows the first B-17 mission which was, as you can see, a very long one – all the way to Lan-chou to drop agents. The one on the right here is a mission in 1950, the second of January and the first time they went close to Beijing. This one was intercepted twice and, as you can see, they made use of Korea. This one landed at Kunsan Air Base, and they would often stage either landing concern and back to Taiwan or stage to Korea to launch the mission out of Korea.

Now when these flights first started, China's air defenses were very rudimentary, especially anywhere other than in Manchuria and around the Korean peninsula. But of course, once the Korean War was over, China could redeploy its growing inventory of Soviet supplied MiG-15s to the south. The first thing that that forced was the end of daytime flying. The squadron had to learn how to fly low at night.

The losses began to come, and this is the roll call of losses of shoot downs and crashes in the first decade of this program. The other thing to mention is that when they first learned to fly at night from the U.S. instructor pilots, they flew under full moon conditions, but as Chinese air defenses improved by '57, they had to learn to fly under dark moon conditions so they would be even less visible to fighter opposition.

The first B-17 – we don't know why that one was lost. It may have flown into high ground, or it may have been a lucky shot by anti-aircraft weapons. The B-26, the next one – it looks like that one flew into the sea before entering, of course flying low to avoid early warning radar detection.

The next two – this was shot down by a MiG-17 day fighter using the full moon. That's all he had, his eyeballs, to see this plane.

I put this in … this was a U.S. Navy P4M Mercator, a SIGINT gathering airplane, which was flying along the coast, also flying at night, but also shot down by a MiG-17 and so therefore these operations moved to flying only in dark moon conditions.

This one flew into the ground inside China trying to evade triple A.

This one was the first airplane in this program to be shot down by a radar-equipped MiG, a MiG-17, which the Chicoms were introducing in the late '50s.

Incidentally, the leaflets were effect at least in so far as the Chinese Air Force was concerned. Here you see a leaflet that was dropped over Chinese airfields. That leaflet was inviting Chinese pilots to defect to Taiwan and giving them course and distance to go because, of course, Taiwan had been erased from the maps that they were given for security reasons. It actually worked.

Today you can go to the Republic of China Air Force Museum at Ching Chuan on Taiwan and you'll see five MiGs and an Aisle 28 Beetle Bomber, all of which defected from the mainland to Taiwan in this period.

B-17s, B-26s, pretty old airplanes, Second World War airplanes, so in the mid-'50s, the airmen assigned to the CIA's air branch, who were almost exclusively U.S. Air Force officers on assignment to the CIA made a proposal to provide a new airplane for these covert missions. This was Project Cherry, and it was the conversion of these P2V Navy patrol planes for the covert role. The contract went to the Skunk Works, of course, and so these five airplanes were actually rolled out of the P2V production line at Burbank, rolled across the runway, into the Skunk Works, where the special mods were done. SIGINT was a major part of the fit, but there was also an enlarged hatch for dropping agents. There was a crew access hatch here that was enlarged. All sorts of things were done to this airplane, and it actually ended up being a pretty expensive program.

For instance, one idea was to provide a wooden boat, which would fit in the bomb bay and could be dropped. There were all sorts of extra add-ons tried out as this program went into development testing and then the operational testing that was done at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida. These airplanes, two of them were deployed to Wiesbaden in Germany in April of '57 and remained there for two years. They were flown by Poles and Czechs, mainly Poles, who had been employed by the agency as deniable airmen, non-American airmen, to fly covert missions in Europe. We still don't know very much about that program, what exactly they got up to, but that's not the focus of what I'm talking about tonight. The other two airplanes, one remained at Eglin for developmental testing. The other two were deployed to Taiwan in December of '57. When the airplanes were withdrawn from Germany in '59, they cycled through Taiwan, as well. They did a couple of other things in the early 1960s out of the U.S. Again, there's been no declassification on that.

Bringing those airplanes in meant that the airbase at Hsinchu had to go through a major upgrade which the U.S. government paid for. This is an aerial shot of Hsinchu as you see shortly after the P2Vs arrived. This is the fleet – this was the 34th Squadron fleet at the time so you can see the B-26s down here, the two B-17s, and a C-47 that was used to transport the American contingent to and from Taipei.

This project had the CIA cryptonym of Polly. ST is the diagraph for the Far East so all projects in the Far East had the ST diagraph. On the Chinese side, it was carried as Project Goshawk. The management of this was through the agency's covert side in Washington and then the successor in Taipei to the Western Hemisphere Company, but still a cover for the CIA station, NACC, Naval Auxiliary Communications Center. It had nothing to do with the Navy; this was a cover name for the CIA station in Taiwan.

From the U.S. side, the program was managed by an Air Force colonel who did a two-year tour, and he was in charge of the Air Section within NACC, and he had an agency employee acting as the manager down at Hsinchu, but all the missions were planned here and only American expertise in this resided in here under the colonel's command. From the Chinese side, the Ministry of Defense's Intel Bureau was running the show through the intel chief or general in

headquarters at CAF, and then a squadron commander out at Hsinchu. There's one of the first squadron commanders; there is the U.S. colonel, and this really was a tight joint operation. The pacomillion center up in Japan was a major supplier of requirements and also a major analyzer of the SIGINT from these flights.

Here's a few pictures to give you a flavor of the closeness of the two sides. Here you have Ray Cline who was the station chief from '57 to '59 in Taiwan. He then came back to Washington to run the analytical side of the agency, but he became great friends with the Chinese in Taiwan and continued to have a lot to do with them. And, indeed, he was a champion of Taiwan right the way through into the '70s. General I Fu En was the general that ran the program in the Chinese Air Force, the intel general. He had been Chiang Kai-shek's personal pilot and then had gone to the States and become the air attaché in Washington. He had good English and knew how to deal with the Americans.

Here's Colonel Lackey who ran the show in Taiwan in the early '60s and he's pinning Chinese wings on a CIA ELINT, an electronic warfare specialist, who served two years in Taiwan and was the gentleman that finally persuaded me that I really needed to research and write this book.

Down here we have Chiang Ching-kuo. He was the son of Chiang Kai-shek and he ran the intelligence programs and as Chiang Kai-shek grew older and less capable, Chiang essentially was the power behind the presidential throne in Taiwan. He actually succeeded to the presidency upon the death of his father – a very interesting man, very down to earth, could be ruthless but he was very intelligent and he really set Taiwan on the path to prosperity and economic progress in the '60s and '70s while not yet relaxing the tight political control of the Nationalists. He's enjoying a joke with Colonel Lackey and his wife.

This is the wife of General I there, and this is the wife of one of the agency's experts in the program in Taiwan. Her name is Polly Rogers and so it seems very unusual that the diagraph for the Polly program which was named after her – at least that's the way she tells it *[laughter]* – still alive, living in Washington.

Here's a couple of P2V missions to give you a flavor of what they got up to once they started. In fact, this one on the left is the very first P2V mission, and if you've got sharp eyes, you'll see 20 March 1947, add 11. The Chinese calendar, the Taiwan calendar, for reasons too complicated to explain, is 11 years behind the U.S. That mission is 1958, March, and as you can see, it was a fly down the coast over Hainan, into Guangdong, and back. That got good ELINT collections from the very start on this mission. ELINT dropped more than 2,000 pounds of leaflets over the big cities of Guangdong province.

These missions were long, long missions, 12 hours, 55 minutes, this one. Here's one going north, 13 hours, 25 minutes, all at night and facing, nearly all the time, some serious opposition from the Chinese air defenses. One of the things I learned from researching this story is how ingenious the Chinese defenders on the mainland were at combating these flights – an absolute top political priority to combat them, of course. They took the Soviet MiG that they'd been given with the Scan Odd radar and they adapted it. It was an air-to-air fighter, the scan of that radar produced a lot of ground clutter if you flew at low level and, of course, they were chasing the Black Bats at

low level. So they inhibited the 14-degree downward scan in elevation to 7 degrees, and in their GCI, they soon modified the rigid Soviet doctrine of ground control of the intercepts.

As I said, one MiG had some success but not yet a radar-equipped MiG. The MiGs were overshooting when they were joining with the P2Vs. The P2Vs were flying slower and remembering that scan, the MiGs would have to slow down and fly higher AOA and then that kind of negated that modification they'd done to the radar scan. So the next thing they did, they had some of these planes – Tu-2P, Second World War bomber, they took the Scan Odd radar out of the MiGs and put it in this plane, they put a second pilot in it, and they flew those against the intruders from Taiwan. They installed 25mm cannons in the wing roots – the second pilot was actually a radar operator. He displaced the navigator in these Tu-2 bombers. They tried that for awhile.

Incidentally, the ELINT operators on the P2Vs didn't know they were being chased by these planes because they couldn't see them, but they did pick up the radar signal, and of course, it was a Scan Odd radar signal and they couldn't figure out how the MiGs were staying with them so long where as before the MiGs were overshooting. Eventually they figured it out.

With these 12- and 13-hour flights over the mainland, these planes couldn't keep up for that long so then the Chinese modified Tu-4s. This was the B-29. The Chinese had been given 10 of these by the Soviets, Soviet-built versions of the B-29. The Chinese took the search radar off the belly of the B-17s and put it on the top of the B-17s and created a W attack version of the B-29. They had two intercept officers in the fuselage of the B-29 plus two navigators. There are stories in my book of air combat at night between P2Vs and B-29s.

And finally, the naval air arm of the People's Republic came up with a coordinated scheme – putting flare bombs on Aleutian Isle 28 and then having MiG-15 two-seat interceptors as a trainer version, but two pairs of eyes are better than one, and if they got the movements correct and the timing correct with the dropping of the flare bombs, then that would light up the intruders and the MiGs would have a shot at them.

This is an extract from the book which gives you a flavor of one of these engagements.

"On the evening of the 19th of November 1960, several MiG-15s and MiG-17PFs tried and failed for two hours to intercept a P2V commanded by Colonel Di Sa Chang that entered Chinese airspace over the Bay of Hong Zhou. One of the newly converted Tu-2P medium bombers, the Tupolev Second World War planes, also tried to follow the intruder. The P2V's SIGINT operators recorded 30 separate radar signals as the aircraft flew low over Anhui province heading northwest. Then the intruder came within reach of the smaller Tu-2Ps. I did mean Tu-4s. The Tu-4s started off; the Tu2s were further inland. Two of those were launched from Zhangzou in Henan Province. But although ground control intercept controllers successively vectored each of those Tu-2s into position behind the intruders, neither could acquire the target because of jamming put out by the P2V. The second Tu-2 followed the P2V for 27 minutes across Hainan at 3,000 feet or lower. The P2V's pilot, his electronic warfare specialist, and the nosegator, the visual guy in the nose, worked together to try and shake off their pursuers. They were heading towards the Chong mountain range, 4,700 feet high.

"Colonel Di increased power and opened the spoilers and prepared to make a sharp turn. As the mountain loomed less than two miles ahead, he racked the aircraft into a 60-degree right bank and followed the nosegator's directions into a narrow valley. At the same time, the EW operator deployed chaff. Flying behind and slightly below the P2V, the front pilot in the Tu-2 failed to spot his quarry's turn. Meanwhile, the second pilot behind him with the radar scope station locked on to the chaff. The Tu-2 crew fired at a not-existent target. Now the mountain was directly ahead and the pilot struggled to climb over it. He failed by 250 feet and the Tu-2 slammed into the peak.

"The rear observer on the P2V escaping down the valley saw the fireball erupt. The 34th Squadron crew flew on with the radio officer listening to the vain calls from the Chinese ground controllers trying to contact and recall the Tu-2.

"Same mission: Air defense controllers reacquired the P2V on their ground radars, ordered the other Tu-2 already airborne to follow it and scrambled the third Tu-2. By now the intruder had spent more than four hours over the mainland and was near Xian in Shanxi province. Another firing pass was ordered. One of the Tu-2s closed within less than a mile. Again, though, its radar was jammed by the P2V. The GCI controller told the Tu-2 to fire anyway, but nothing more was heard from them. They, too, had flown into rising ground at about 1,000 feet southwest of Yeshan.

"The remaining Tu-2 was recalled to base. At the debriefing, the Chinese concluded that both crashes were caused by the pilots being temporarily blinded by tracer fire from the cannons located in their wing roots.

"The P2V was now heading along its return course to Taiwan but more danger lay ahead as the aircraft passed over Hainan again. Triple A guns opened up, firing at least 150 rounds. The P2V maneuvered to escape them, but the aircraft's engines had been operated at maximum power for a long time evading the pursuers, and one of them now began to backfire. Colonel Di retarded the throttles and set course direct for Taiwan as the rest of the mission was aborted. The P2V limped back to Hsinchu and landed safely after an overflight mission that had lasted 10 hours and 45 minutes."

This is not Colonel Di's crew. This is another crew who were lucky to come back. That's Triple A flack damage from a mission and of that group here, I think photographed in 1960, before they began losing these airplanes, I think only three of that group survived the squadron. The rest of them were killed in the subsequent shoot downs and crashes.

This is the losses of the P2Vs over mainland China or on their way there. The squadron commander, Colonel Yin, you saw him earlier shaking hands with the U.S. colonel. He was killed crashing into high ground in Korea at night on a staging flight into Kunsan.

In 1961, again much Chinese-Communist ingenuity. Sadly, the mission planners were flying some of the same routes more than once, and the Chicoms figured out the route in from Korea across the Shandong peninsula and they managed to send extra Triple A guns to the area and

they literally ambushed this plane. The third one crashed before coast-in, coming low across the sea to try to avoid the early warning radars – 50 feet.

The first one shot down by a MiG and then finally the illumination technique accounted for another squadron commander, Colonel Sun, and as you can see, full crews on these flights: pilot, co-pilot and command pilot, two navigators, flight engineer, two electronic warfare officers, radio operator listening to the Chicom air defenses, two kickers, two parachute dispatch officers responsible in the back for pushing out the leaflets and the very occasional agents who were dropped. Anyway, you got up to 12 or 13 people and that's how the roll call of dead went over 100.

This was an electronic countermeasures game as well. The P2Vs were consistently improved with the latest EW technology that the U.S. could offer, some of it especially commissioned by the agency, some of it brought in from Air Force or Navy contracts. The bomber defense officer was a new position created to operate the very clever absolute state of the art repeater-jammer that was put on the plane in '61; a new analysis center set up at Hsinchu to really analyze, take the recordings and make the time traces of all the events of the mission to try and learn lessons and improve the survivability of the planes; exhaust flame suppressors because even in that darkness, you could see the flames and that would be. In fact, the MiG-17 that shot the 1963 P2V must have been eagle-eyed; he saw the flame suppressors, that's all he saw. And finally, even a terrain-following radar, just pre-dating the F-111, Texas Instruments, the same company that put on these planes in late '963. And, yes, even air-to-air missiles were put on. I discuss what value those were – not much, probably would never have worked, but anyway, they were added.

Five P2Vs lost, five were lost of the original airplanes so the agency had another two converted by the Skunk Works, and those two did survive and went back to the States. These are actually the last two seen at Hsinchu at about 1965.

A new program was started to replace them and this was it. Take the successor to the P2 as the Navy standard patrol plane, the P3, and make that into a covert airplane. And three, this was the program led by the Office of ELINT in the CIA, and it was lucky it didn't get the contract, much to the annoyance of Kelly Johnson who kind of presumed he was going to get the contract because he always got these contracts. So when it went out to tender, he submitted a kind of a two page summary which basically said "send money, we'll do the job," and the agency felt that wasn't good enough and they gave the job instead to LTV Electrosystems in Greenville. That later became E Systems. So they did it, a lot of money spent. As you can see, a lot of new equipment went into these planes, a very expensive job. They went to Hsinchu in May and July 1966 but they never flew over the mainland.

Here's a view of Hsinchu in 1966. You can see the first of the P3s have arrived, one of the last two P2Vs. They used a standard P2V-5 for crew trainer, that didn't do penetration missions. C-123, I'll talk about that in a minute, and there's the faithful C-47. The terrain-following radar was giving problems. The Chinese pilots didn't really trust it and so they spent a few months wringing that out in flights around Taiwan. But in the meantime, a new director of Central Intelligence arrived in Washington, Richard Helms, and he reviewed this program and some others, and he felt that it was not providing enough intelligence to justify the expense and the

risk. I should say that after that fifth shoot down to the P2V in '64, that pretty much closed them down. They only flew about two overflights the following year and two in '66. So they weren't doing much, and Helms decided to end it and the airplanes were recalled to the U.S.

Chiang Ching-kuo was furious about this. It caused a major rift for a time in Taiwan-U.S. relations because Chiang Ching-kuo was a clever cookie, sort of saw this as a thin end of a developing wedge between the U.S. and Taiwan which, indeed, would prove to be the case with the opening to China in the early '70s. So the squadron operation over mainland China came to an end, and they withdrew the airplanes in early 1967.

What good had all this done? Well, of course, from the Nationalist's side – this is another one of those propaganda leaflets – and this is what they hoped would happen and this is what the mainland would rise up in rebellion and the People's Liberation Army would see the error of the hierarchy's ways in Peking, and they would all flock to the Nationalist banner. It never happened as it never happened in Eastern Europe, in Albania, in the Baltic States after the Second World War. The Communist system had a lock-step on its population and nothing was going to change that. Certainly a bunch of leaflets and airplanes from Taiwan wasn't going to change that.

From the U.S. side, I still find it difficult to assess the value. Undoubtedly a lot of SIGINT about the Chinese air defenses was obtained and passed into the Strategic Air Command and could provide target folders and target avoidance for nuclear B-52s if they ever had to attack mainland China. But it's difficult to tell exactly what the worth of this was and make a final call on that.

So, finally to the kind of epilogue to this story if you like, the Project Haylift. As the U.S. involvement in Vietnam grew in the early '60s, the CIA began dropping agents into North Vietnam and to do this, they turned to the Black Bats from Taiwan. They were equipped initially with C-123Bs and they started flying over the mainland. I've got that wrong, it was '61, I think. That was the CIA project.

In 1964 the MAC-V, the Military Assistance Command – Vietnam, program was formed and took over this covert air operation through the special ops group in Saigon, but they kept employing the Chinese guys. The airplanes were modified twice, and these Chinese crews from Taiwan flew no fewer than 253 missions over North Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia from 1962 through 1972.

They lost airplanes in training. They had one shot down by Viet Cong on approach to Saigon, but they didn't actually have any shot down over North Vietnam although there was aerial combat there, too. A bizarre story about how the North Vietnamese – oh, what was it? – a couple of Laotian pilots had defected to North Vietnam, two T-28s, and they chased the C-123s at night from North Vietnam with these T-28s, and one of them got in some shots and crippled the airplane, but the airplane was able to get across the border and land in Thailand. But they still lost air crews in training, flight losses and in that shoot down near Saigon.

As I said earlier, the missions over China finished in 1967, but not quite – one more mission. I'm sorry that I've screwed up here. There should be a picture of a C-130E in here because this was a unique mission that was flown in 1969, and its objective was to drop sensors – motion sensors,

light sensors – in the desert of northwest China to gather intelligence on the Chinese nuclear weapons development program. You'll remember that the Chinese had exploded their first nuclear device in October 1964 and relatively little was known about it. The agency and the U.S. intelligence community were desperate to find out more. They had carted nuclear powered sensors up mountainsides in Tibet and Iran, and line of sight attempts, all sorts of things. Then they came up with this scheme to drop palletized sensors out of the back of a C-130 over Locknor and Zhang Sinzu area, a long, long way to go, and the Chinese were chosen to do it from Taiwan. This squadron, two crew selected, off they went to the U.S.A. in September of 1968. They checked out on C-130s in the training unit, I think it was in Tennessee, and then the agency took them to Groom Lake where they did their mission training. They were the first foreign airmen, and I think maybe the last foreign airmen, to be trained at Groom Lake. A C-130E was specially modified by the agency's special ops division and it had all the latest gizmos, TFR working by now, probably infrared nav system, all the rest of it.

The sensors were fascinating. They were made by the Sandia Laboratory, very clever stuff, and they were put on pallets, and the pallets were disguised as rocks and painted as if they were desert rocks. They would be rolled out the back of the C-130s over the areas. All this training was done, as you can see, just to train the guys through the C-130 basic into the operational training and then ready to do this took that long. So you can have a sense of how badly U.S. intel wanted to know more about China's nuclear weapons development.

So off they went and they flew the mission out of Takhli, China, at a gross weight exceeding the manual, of course, for the 123 at the time, and flown on the night of 17-18 May of '69, and there it's coming out of Takhli, Thailand, and going, very carefully designed to try, there were early radars. This is the Himalayas, and they knew where the radars were because the P2Vs had plotted all those, and so carefully mission planned to terrain mask this airplane from the Chicom radars to the east. It was a 13-hour mission. They kind of ran a bit short of fuel on the way back. Here's the drop zones, and they only picked up a very brief trace of painting by China radars. And so it was mission success, but we don't know whether it was a sensor success because that has not been declassified. Actually, I should say that hardly any of this has been declassified on the U.S. side, but we've gotten most of our information from Taiwan.

A second mission was planned, and the crews for that were deployed to the States and were training at Groom Lake when they were pulled back, and I think that the consensus is that by that time, we're in 1970 now, satellites and the ground sensors, the nuclear detonation sensor system, had improved sufficiently, they didn't want to take this risk again.

So, there we are – a very unique and pretty much unknown operation. The Nationalists were very proud of it. They announced the successful overflights from time to time. To this day, they are very proud of it. They've just opened, a few months ago, a little museum to this operation in Hsinchu town, very nicely done. I was privileged to be there for the opening and if any of you are likely to visit Taiwan in the next year or so, ask me for a leaflet about that museum and please try and go there.

So, summing it all up, a couple of quotes I like to use. They're in the book and first of all from the Chinese side, from the general in charge of intelligence, that's him there inspecting the B-26

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crew. And then one from my mentor on this program, I suppose, from one of the Americans. But summing up, I think the American view from the inside of this program.

And so I'll finish by putting up a picture of the Generalissimo himself, Chiang Kai-shek, with crewmen from the Black Bats. I'll pay tribute to my co-author in Taiwan, Clarence Fu who has published a number of aviation books and, of course, was an invaluable part of this project. He has, in fact, published this story in Taiwan, in Chinese, and my book is based on his book, but, of course, I was able to use my U.S. contacts and interviews to amplify the story and provide more of the political context for a Western audience.