



Back to the basics

Energy crunch has raised interest in alternate power.

Focus A-9



Second-half surge?

Last half of season begins Monday for Drillers.

Sports B-1

TULSA WORLD

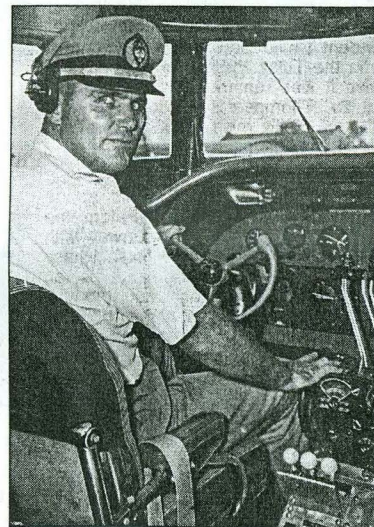
SINCE 1905

★★ FINAL EDITION

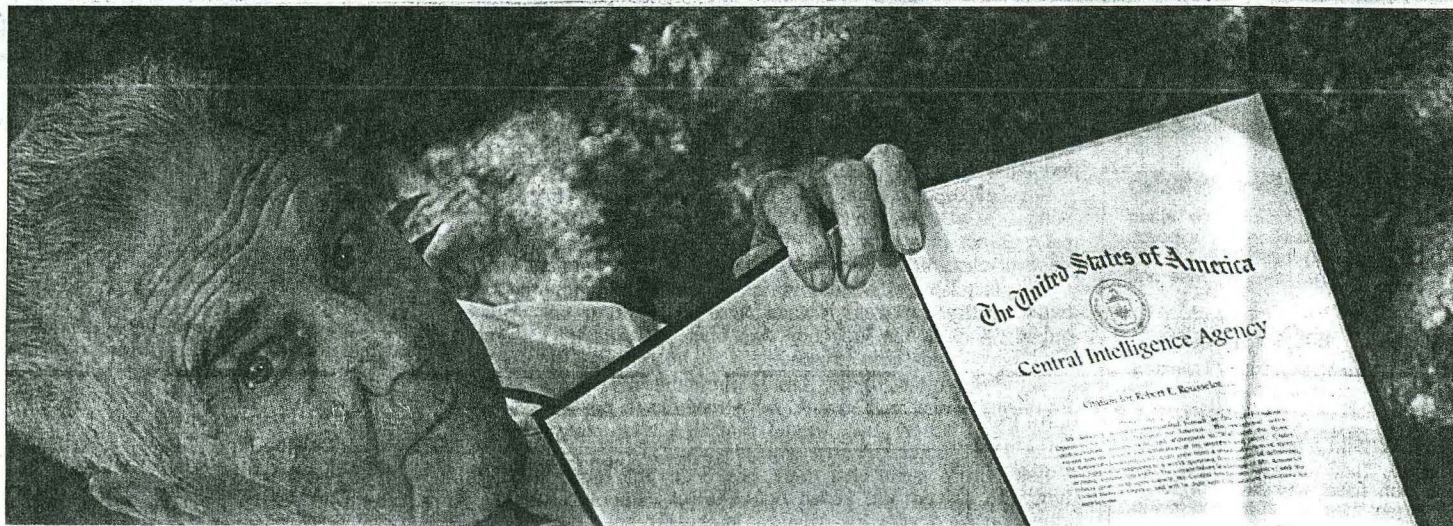
50¢



A need-to-know basis



A young Robert Rousselot (right) sits in the cockpit of the plane he flew as an Air America pilot, ferrying troops over enemy borders and into countries that were falling to communism.





Photos by STEPHEN PINGRY / Tulsa World

Robert Rousselot holds his citation from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, which honored him this month for service in a job he never admitted to until now.

X-CIA pilot wouldn't discuss career until now

ASHLEY PARRISH
Staff Writer

LAY — A herd of cattle grazes slowly, as if there weren't cars lining by just a few feet away. Pipes that make up the cattle are incentive enough to out.

tal buildings and barns dot the ranchland. But Bob Rousselot's home is set deep into the property, a tidy house hiding in a grove of trees.

Abell and Robert Rousselot arrived here in 1966 when he de-

ecided to become a rancher. All he wanted was some land with a few trees and some water nearby.

He got it on the banks of Fort Gibson Lake in Okay, where he raised two sons who respectfully call him "The Boss."

A sign that sits over Rousselot's chair cements the nickname's place in this house. It's a title that he could have earned anywhere in the world, but he got it here on the ranch.

Back in the days when Rousselot was running a successful airline in Asia, he was just "Rouss."

It's how he was known to CIA agents and friends alike.

The not-so secret secret

Rousselot won't talk until the citation is in his hand. Only when his son and wife bring it back to the ranch does he really believe it.

The Central Intelligence Agency honored him June 3 for his distinguished service and leadership in a job he's never admitted to having until now.

His wife, and son, Wade, accepted it on his behalf in front of

900 people at the annual Air America conference in Las Vegas.

First as chief pilot and then as vice president of operations for Air America, Rousselot was helping the CIA, which had secretly bought the airline in 1950, he says.

As a pilot, he snuck across enemy borders to drop guerilla fighters into countries that were falling to communism. He dropped weapons and food in China, Vietnam, Korea and Laos.

SEE PILOT A-3

PILOT:

Working for the CIA, Roussetot said, he was taught to keep his mouth shut and his head in the sand.

FROM A-1

Later, as an executive for the airline, he also helped run the commercial airline that Air America told the world it was.

During the day, Roussetot managed hundreds of employees — the pilots, flight attendants and mechanics that it took to run flight routes through Asia. But he was also sending those same pilots out on missions for the United States.

Roussetot's wife knew, of course. But she was CIA, as well.

With so many employees, however, the secret wasn't kept for very long, Roussetot knows now.

"It's like a man walking through a hotel lobby with his zipper open," Roussetot says. "Everyone knows but him."

He wasn't going to be the one to blab about it, though.

"I was always taught to keep my mouth shut and my head in the sand," he says. Even when he knew he was getting the citation — and that the secret was officially out — Roussetot waited to talk about it.

Now, he pulls out that citation over and over again.

"I never thought I would ever see one of these," he says.

Civil Air Transport

In 1946, as a young fighter pilot about to be discharged from the Marines, Roussetot started hearing stories about Gen. Claire Chennault and the small airline he operated.

"It was a ragtag little cargo airline in China," he says.

But through the U.S.-sponsored Chinese National Relief Program, it was developing a reputation dropping medical supplies and food to the Chinese amid their civil war.

Roussetot signed up to help.

The cargo business kept the airline alive, Roussetot says. But in 1950, company officials got an offer they didn't think twice about accepting.

The CIA secretly arranged to buy Civil Air Transport because of its reputation in the tumultu-

ous country. The airline was to help "support the Republic of China nationalist government."

With the nationalist government struggling against the communists, the CIA-trained teams were stationed all over the region — at the edge of Tibet, in western China and in the surrounding countries, Roussetot says.

The teams were trained to sabotage the communist troops and report back strategies to the CIA. Civil Air Transport was supporting them all by sneaking in food, arms and sometimes reinforcements.

The pilots also were sent out on "leaflet flights," Roussetot remembers. They would pick a region of China and dump thousands of leaflets to the people.

"They said, 'Keep the faith. Everything's going to be fine. There's a big uprising.' As time went on, we had pretty much saturated the area."

After the borders were closed, Roussetot made one of the first — and deepest — overland flights into China. By then, the airline was stationed in Taiwan and the anti-communist forces were losing.

First in and last out

Fueled by successful missions

all through China, Civil Air Transport pilots were asked to assist in the Korean War, airlifting supplies to troops, and later to help the French hold on to their colonies in Indochina.

In Dien Bien Phu, Vietnam, French paratroopers were trying to fight back an oncoming army. But with depleting supplies, they were falling fast. The government asked Civil Air Transport pilots to step in and fly ammunition and food into the isolated valley.

"They would have wiped out the French right there," Roussetot says of the approaching Vietminh. "We flew when French pilots wouldn't" come in to help.

"We had a motto," Roussetot says. "First in and last out."

Civil Air Transport flew 682 missions into Dien Bien Phu between March 1954 and the city's fall in May of the same year. By this time, though, Roussetot wasn't flying anymore.

"I was restricted from flying because of the secrets I knew," he says.

But he was hand-picking the pilots who were to go.

He lost two pilots in the mission, he says.

Of the thousands of employees, Civil Air Transport officials count 242 casualties. The CIA

counts 243.

"The largest part of these losses came in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam," Roussetot says. "They were shot down."

Air America

In 1959, Civil Air Transport was renamed "Air America."

"We'd have a pilot one day in uniform with stewardesses, and the next day in camouflage clothing on a midnight flight crossing the water from China," he says.

"Civil Air Transport and Air America coexisted," Roussetot says. And, even while trying to aid the U.S. government, Air America had to begin competing with commercial airlines like Pan-American.

He was ready to ranch, and a friend told him Oklahoma was beautiful. It took a couple more years to get here — he was waylaid by a commercial airline that needed some help — but, when he did, he didn't want to leave.

He built one of the larger ranches in the area. Civic commendations cover the walls of his home. But he had nothing from his years with Air America until now.

Not even his stories, because he didn't feel like he could tell

them to anyone but he now tells a story about 12,000 pounds of money China.

The nationalist government China was printing more United States.

Civil Air Transport v to fly it back to the co experienced engine pro during the flight.

Worried about havin much weight on board lot's crew started push barrels of money out o plane.

After landing succes nese security guards s every inch of the plane money and dogged Ro every step for weeks t sure that he hadn't sta somewhere.

No one believed him none of those millions back to Okay, he laug

It was a story that V selot has heard severa now — but one of the

"He told us what he us to know — not eve Roussetot's son says.

"There's still stuff h vulge."

Ashley Parrish, World sta be reached at 581-8318 or ashley.parrish@tulsaworld.c