

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination FormSee instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For NPS use only

received

MAY 23 1983

date entered

**1. Name**

historic Chennault House

and/or common same

**2. Location**

street &amp; number LA 15 just south of Gilbert

N/A not for publication

city, town Gilbert ☒ vicinity of

state LA code 22 county Franklin Parish code 041

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	N/A being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: vacant

**4. Owner of Property**

name Mr. and Mrs. Ernest N. Chennault

Phone: (318) 435-4828

street &amp; number General Delivery

city, town Gilbert ☒ vicinity of

state LA 71336

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Franklin Parish Courthouse

street &amp; number Main Street (no specific address) P. O. Box 70

city, town Winnsboro

state LA 71295

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title LA Historic Sites Survey

has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ no

date 1982

☐ federal ☒ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records LA State Historic Preservation Office

city, town Baton Rouge

state LA

## 7. Description

### Condition

☐ excellent  
☒ good  
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated  
☐ ruins  
☐ unexposed

### Check one

☒ unaltered  
☐ altered

### Check one

☒ original site  
☐ moved date N/A

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Chennault House (1905) is a modest single story Queen Anne Revival cottage set in flat country just south of the town of Gilbert. The house has no serious integrity problem.

The frame house is raised approximately two feet above the ground. The main portion of the house has a central hall with one room on the south side and two rooms on the north side. The second room protrudes forward from the house and terminates in a semi-octagonal bay under a forward facing gable. There is also a three-bay front gallery which abuts the semi-octagonal bay. To the rear of the main portion of the house is a kitchen-dining room wing which also contains a bedroom. There is also a small porch on the rear of the house. The house is sheathed in narrow gauge clapboard throughout. Windows are four over four with plain framing boards. Most of the windows have been boarded up. One of the chimneys is gone, although both of the original mantels remain. The parlor mantel, which is the more elaborate of the two, has fluted framing boards and corner blocks. The front gallery features Eastlake columns and balusters as well as scrollsaw ornamentation. There is also scrollsaw ornamentation in the front gable.

Since the house was built, the following changes have been made:

- (1) The old side gallery on the kitchen-dining room wing has been enclosed.
- (2) One of the chimneys has fallen.
- (3) Many of the windows have been boarded up.
- (4) The roof has been recovered in tin.

These changes should be regarded as minimal because they have no effect upon one's perception of the style or period of the house. As a result, the house still vividly conveys its associations with Lt. General Chennault.

NB: Although the house is vacant at present, the owners plan to restore it for use as a museum honoring Chennault and the Flying Tigers.

Immediately to the rear of the house is a tar paper shack which is listed as a non-contributing element because it was built within the last fifty years and is not significant.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** House dates from 1905  
**Significance claimed** for World War II  
**Builder/Architect** Builder: John Stonewall Chennault

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)** Criterion B

The Chennault House is nationally significant in the area of military history because of its association with Lt. General Claire Lee Chennault, an "exceptionally significant" World War II aviation hero. The house was built in 1905 by Claire's father, John Stonewall Chennault, as the family's residence. Claire at this time was 12 years of age. As far as the State Historic Preservation Office can determine, he actually lived in the house under consideration during the following periods: (1) 1905-1909; (2) during the summer while he was in college; and (3) three or four years c.1912-c.1915 while he was teaching school in Franklin Parish. In addition, according to his brother, E. N. Chennault, he visited there on numerous occasions until his father's death in 1942 and considered it "home."

### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH:

Claire Lee Chennault was born in Commerce, Texas on September 6, 1893. His parents had been in Texas on a business trip, and returned to their home in Gilbert in the spring of 1894. This house, where they lived until 1905 when the present house was constructed, is no longer extant.

Claire lived in the present house from 1905 until January, 1909 when he began his two year course of study at LSU in Baton Rouge. He then took a teacher's course at Louisiana State Normal School in Natchitoches. His first job as a school teacher was in Athens in Franklin Parish. While teaching in the parish schools for three or four years (early to mid teens), he lived with his parents in the nominated property. He then went to New Orleans and then later to Akron, Ohio, where he worked in a factory which produced military balloons for the Allies in World War I.

In 1917 Chennault volunteered for service and was assigned to the Officer Training Corps at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana. He was later commissioned a First Lieutenant in the Infantry Reserve, but was soon transferred to the aviation section of the Signal Corps as a result of his experience with balloons, which were then considered more important than planes. Chennault applied for flight training within five months after he entered the Army. His application was rejected with the comment: "Does not possess the necessary qualifications to be a successful aviator." He submitted his second application at the time his unit was transferred to Langley Field, Virginia and was accepted three months later. He began flight training in November, 1918, at Ellington Field, Texas. He took a course in aeronautical engineering at Kelly Field and was graduated an engineering officer in October, 1919. On April 9, 1920, he received an honorable discharge, and on September 14, 1920, he applied for a permanent commission as a First Lieutenant in the Army Air Service, which was later to become the Army Air Corp.

Chennault's career as a pursuit pilot began in 1922 when he passed the rigid test of the First Pursuit Group, and was assigned to the 94th "Hat in the Ring" Squadron. He then was transferred to the 12th Observation Squadron, 1922-23, where he served as engineering officer at Fort Bliss, Texas. In the fall of 1923, orders sent him to Luke Field, Hawaii, where he commanded the 19th Pursuit Squadron for 2½ years.

CONTINUED

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

## 10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property approx .08 acre

Quadrangle name Winnsboro, LA

Quadrangle scale 1=62500

UTM References

A 

1	5	6	2	6	7	7	5	3	5	4	6	0	5	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B 

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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Please refer to sketch map.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
N/A			

state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

ASSISTED BY OWNERS

name/title National Register Staff, Division of Historic Preservation

organization State of Louisiana

date February 1982--revised April 1983

street & number P. O. Box 44247

telephone 504-342-6682

city or town Baton Rouge

state LA 70804

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☒ national ☐ state ☐ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*Robert B. DeBlieux*  
Robert B. DeBlieux

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date May 3, 1983

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

*for Melorus Byers*  
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the  
National Register

date

6/23/83

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
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8. Significance (cont'd)

From 1929-1930, Claire Chennault was a flying instructor at Brook Field, Texas. He later became director of flying there and wrote a primary flying manual. He received a Captain's commission in April, 1929. His strong love of pursuit tactics gave him an opportunity to study at the Air Corps Tactical School at Langley Field, Virginia until 1931.

Chennault was then assigned to Maxwell Field in Alabama as a senior instructor in fighter tactics. During this period (the early and mid-1930's) Maxwell Field was the "think tank" for the development of Air Corps tactical theory. The essential debate (which is still ongoing) was between the proponents of fighter planes versus bomber planes. In contrast to those who regarded strategic bombing as the answer, Chennault gained notoriety as the champion of fighter planes. He articulated his ideas in print in a textbook entitled The Role of Defensive Pursuit (written between 1933 and 1935). In addition, he had articles on the subject published in the Coast Artillery Journal, U. S. Air Services and the Infantry Journal between 1933 and 1936. Chennault's basic theory was one of detection-interception-destruction. With definite, continuing information, defending pursuit planes could be sent up at the proper time and altitude to intercept and destroy the enemy before he reached his targets.

In 1936, Chennault was promoted to Major. As a result of deafness and chronic bronchitis, he retired in 1937 at Barksdale Field, Louisiana.

In the summer of 1937, Chennault accepted a Chinese offer to head that country's pilot training program and to serve as aviation advisor to Chiang Kai-Shek. During the following four years he saw his best pilots killed, planes wrecked on the ground, and training fields bombed. The country's few aircraft assembly plants were destroyed, captured, or closed by the threat of bombing. During this period he was permitted by Madame Chiang Kai-Shek (Commander of the Chinese Air Force) to go after the Japanese himself in a specially adapted Curtiss Hawk. Very few people know that Claire Lee Chennault, the old cast-off of the Army Air Corps, was one of the leading aces of World War II. He was credited with many air victories (in excess of 30), and this was prior to Pearl Harbor.

Claire Chennault is best known as the commander of the American Volunteer Group, or "Flying Tigers," which operated in China for 6-1/2 months (late 1941-early 1942). The American Volunteer Group (AVG) was formed in 1941 with the executive approval of President Roosevelt. It had a total of three squadrons consisting of approximately 100 pilots and a total personnel of 300. During its short existence, this small unit of American fliers destroyed a confirmed 297 Japanese aircraft and accounted for an estimated 1500 enemy airmen killed. In addition, the AVG claimed another 153 enemy planes as "probables" (aircraft downed which were never officially confirmed). In comparison, the AVG losses were drastically small, especially when compared to the enemy's superior numbers. The group lost a total of 73 P-40's. Twelve were lost in combat and 61 were destroyed on the ground, including 22 not in flying condition which were burned to prevent capture by the Japanese. Personnel losses amounted to four pilots killed in air

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8. Significance (continued)

combat, six killed in anti-aircraft fire, three killed on the ground by enemy bombing action, and ten killed in accidents. Three pilots were shot down in enemy territory and taken prisoners.

Decorations received by individuals of the AVG were numerous. Commander Claire Chennault's decorations included the Chinese Cloud Banner and Long Sword of a Commander, the Order of the British Empire, and later the U. S. Distinguished Service Medal.

In March, 1942, General Stillwell and his representative, Colonel Bissell, made it quite clear that the AVG would no longer receive supplies if they continued to refuse induction into the U. S. Army. Induction was inevitable, although opposed by Chennault and over 90% of the total AVG personnel. The unit designated to replace the AVG was the China Air Task Force, activated July 4, 1942. Chennault was to control air operations against the Japanese in China, but was to be subordinate to Brigadier General Bissell.

On March 3, 1943, Chennault was promoted to Major General. He commanded the 14th Air Force, activated March 10, 1943, until his retirement in October, 1945.

After his retirement Chennault remained in Asia except for short trips to the United States. In December 1950 his wife purchased a house in Monroe, which served as a mailing address and a place to stay while in that part of the country. This house, a c.1940 one-story brick veneer structure, is extant; however, Claire Chennault's association with it is very weak. During the time his wife owned the house, they were residents of Taipei, Formosa and spent most of their time there.

Chennault was promoted to Lt. General a short time before he died of lung cancer July 27, 1958.

Some of the honors bestowed upon Chennault are listed below:

1. Chennault Air Force Base (SAC), now deactivated, was dedicated on November 14, 1958.
2. A portrait of the founder of the AVG was placed in the gallery of Air Force leaders at the Air Force Academy, November 18, 1966.
3. A Texas historical marker was erected at the site of Chennault's birthplace in Commerce, Texas, March 30, 1969.
4. Reactivation of the 23rd Fighter Group, originally activated July 4, 1942, was made at England Air Force Base, Louisiana on July 4, 1972.
5. Lt. General Claire Lee Chennault was named to the Aviation Hall of Fame at Dayton, Ohio, in 1972.

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8. Significance (cont'd)

6. A drive encircling the heart of the academic campus at the Headquarters Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, was designated "Chennault Circle" on May 22, 1975.
7. A recreational complex, city of Monroe, LA. was named "Chennault Park" at a dedication ceremony June 13, 1976.
8. A bronze statue of Gen. Chennault, a gift to Louisiana by the Republic of China, was unveiled on the grounds of the Pentagon Barracks, old LSU Campus, Baton Rouge, La., on October 8, 1976.

EXCEPTIONAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Claire Chennault is "exceptionally significant" because his legendary Flying Tigers were heroes at a time when America needed them most. They were winning, observed Roosevelt administration official, Thomas G. Corcoran, "when we most needed victory."

Americans were stunned, embarrassed and vengeful in the wake of Pearl Harbor. Most importantly, this "day that will live in infamy" shook their belief in the United States' invincibility. The American psyche desperately needed reassurance, which Chennault's Flying Tigers provided. It did not matter that they were technically in the employ of China; they were still Americans defeating Japanese. Their victories surely must have been something of a psychological release for an insecure and aroused American public. They were symbols of active and victorious resistance at a critical time. It is important to remember that these victories occurred in the early months after our entry into the war, considerably before the Allies scored any of their big military successes.

The above described post-Pearl Harbor mood of the country was and is common knowledge. The following assessment made shortly after the event by news commentator Marquis W. Childs is representative: "No American who lived through that Sunday will ever forget it. It seared deeply into the national consciousness, shearing away illusions that had been fostered for generations. And with the first shock came a sort of panic. This struck our deepest pride. It tore at the myth of our invulnerability. Striking at the precious legend of our might, it seemed to leave us suddenly naked and defenseless. . . ."

Of course, the above assessment of Chennault's "exceptional significance" hinges upon proving that the Flying Tigers' exploits were well-known to the American public in the few months immediately following Pearl Harbor. After researching the matter extensively in secondary and primary sources, it is abundantly clear to the State Historic Preservation Office that Chennault and the Flying Tigers were given worldwide media coverage during this period. Our staff did not have access to radio broadcasts nor did we have the time to comb through contemporaneous newspapers. We did, however,

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## 8. Significance (continued)

find considerable coverage in magazines such as Life, Time, and Newsweek. In addition, it was evident from the numerous other sources listed in the bibliography that such was the case. For example, Churchill was obviously aware of their amazing record. In early 1942 he observed: "The victories they have won may well prove comparable . . . with the Battle of Britain." A lengthy photo essay on the Flying Tigers appeared in Life in March, 1942 with the title "Flying Tigers in Burma: Handful of American Pilots Shoot Down 300 Jap Warplanes in 90 Days." By August, 1942, Chennault was on the cover of Life. The story inside praised his record as follows: "Chennault is now on the crest of the wave. His fame as an ever-victorious commander among a group of ever-defeated Allied generals has spread around the world." Similar coverage, for example, also appears in the June, 1942 issue of Reader's Digest and several issues of Time and Newsweek. By the end of the war Chennault had also appeared on the covers of both Time and Newsweek.

It is a given then that the American psyche desperately needed victories over the Japanese in the months immediately following Pearl Harbor and that the record of Chennault's Flying Tigers was reported worldwide during this period. It is then logical and well-founded to assume that these victories had an impact on American morale. By definition, such an assumption is difficult, if not impossible, to prove. One would theoretically have to have written or oral records wherein people explained their reaction to hearing about the Flying Tigers' victories. However, and very importantly, we do know from secondary and primary sources that they were hailed as heroes in this country.

One of our sources, a 1942 history of the Flying Tigers, confirms our interpretation of the psychological impact of their victories on the American mind. The author writes on Christmas Day, 1941: "Pearl Harbor was a taste strong and bitter in every mouth. . . . It was a sickening thing to see Americans doubting their own strength. . . . On that day there was a kind of panic in the land. Then suddenly . . . came the news of the first shining victory over the forces of Nippon. The Flying Tigers had flown and struck." He then observes that the radios and newspapers "told us happily" of the Tigers' victories. Finally, in reference to a particularly smashing Tiger victory in late December, 1941, the author concludes: "It lifted the gloom of defeats and doubtings from the American mind. And is sent a thrill of pride and a chill of determination right where they could do the most good--down the great American spine. Those were the Christmas gifts of the Tigers to the folks back home."

## THE ASSOCIATION:

In the opinion of the State Historic Preservation Office, the Chennault House is eligible for the Register because of its association with an individual of "exceptional significance" on the national level. "Exceptional significance" is being claimed for Chennault's contributions as commander of the American Volunteer Group ("Flying Tigers"), which conducted air operations in China against the Japanese in late 1941/early 1942. As was noted earlier, Chennault moved to China in 1937 and

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8. Significance (continued)

remained there, except for short trips to the United States, almost up until his death in 1958. His "exceptional" contributions were made in late 1941-early 1942 when he was in China, and obviously properties associated with this period cannot be nominated to the Register.

It would be extremely difficult, even impossible, to pinpoint all the properties in the United States Chennault may have been associated with in one way or another. In any event, as the preceding biographical sketch illustrates, Chennault, like other military men, was constantly on the move and never remained in any one place for very long. Also, none of these properties would be associated with the period for which "exceptional significance" is claimed.

As far as the State Historic Preservation Office can determine, there is only one other property in the country which might be eligible for the Register on the basis of its association with Chennault. As described elsewhere, Chennault taught at Maxwell Field in Alabama from 1931 to 1936 and it was here that he gained notoriety as the foremost champion of fighter planes over strategic bombing. According to sources at an Air Force research center at Maxwell, the hall where Chennault conducted classes is extant and intact. The same source assumes that Chennault must have lived on the base in officers quarters, which also survive from that period. However, the source was not certain if the one (or ones) occupied by Chennault could be readily or easily identified. In any event, although Maxwell is associated with a productive period in Chennault's life, he did not live or work there during the period for which "exceptional significance" is claimed. (After investigating the matter, the State Historic Preservation Office does not feel able to make a case for "exceptional significance" on the basis of Chennault's role in the development of air tactical theory.)

As noted elsewhere, as far as the State Historic Preservation Office can determine, Chennault actually lived in the house under consideration during the following periods: (1) 1905-1909; (2) during the summer while he was in college; and (3) three or four years c.1912-c.1915 while he was teaching school in Franklin Parish. In addition, according to his brother, E. N. Chennault, he visited there on numerous occasions, at least until his father's death in 1942, and considered it "home."

Ordinarily, of course, properties such as this are not considered eligible for the Register because they are not associated with the individual's productive period. However, given the above considerations, we believe this one to be an exception. In short, given the fact that we cannot nominate a property associated with Chennault's period of "exceptional significance" in China and given the fact that Chennault was constantly on the move while in this country, we contend that his home in Gilbert is just as eligible as any other property in the United States and probably has a stronger association than all but perhaps one (Maxwell). In reference to Maxwell, in our opinion, an individual's family home is more easily identified with him than an impersonal barracks complex and classroom building with which innumerable other people have been temporarily associated.

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9. Bibliography

Books:

Archibald, Joe. Commander of the Flying Tigers: Claire Lee Chennault. New York: Julian Messner, 1966.

Ayling, Kieth. Old Leatherface of the Flying Tigers: The Story of General Chennault. New York and Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1945.

Chennault, Anna. Chennault and the Flying Tigers. New York: Paul S. Eriksson, Inc., 1963.

Chennault, Claire Lee. Way of a Fighter: The Memoirs of Claire Lee Chennault. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1949.

Cornelius, Wanda and Short, Thayne. Ding Hao: America's Air War in China, 1937-1945. Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, 1980.

Hotz, Robert B. With General Chennault: The Story of the Flying Tigers. New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1943.

Melosi, Martin V. The Shadow of Pearl Harbor: Political Controversy over the Surprise Attack, 1941-1946. College Station, Texas and London: Texas A & M University Press, 1977.

Mims, Sam. Chennault of the Flying Tigers. Philadelphia: Macrae-Smith-Company, 1943.

Scott, Robert Lee, Jr., Flying Tiger: Chennault of China. Garden City, New York:

Whelan, Russell. The Flying Tigers: The Story of the American Volunteer Group. New York: Viking Press, 1942.

Personal Communications:

Dr. Joseph G. Dawson III, Assistant Professor, Texas A & M, Galveston, February 9, 1982.  
Dr. Dawson's speciality is United States military history.

Harry Fletcher, Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, Alabama, November, 1982.

Dr. Stanley Hilton, Professor of History, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, February 9, 1982. One of Dr. Hilton's specialities is World War II military history.

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9. Bibliography (continued)

Dr. Daniel R. Mortensen, Historian, Headquarters, Office of Air Force History, Washington, D. C., February 12, 1982. Dr. Mortensen's speciality is tactical theory.

Dr. Thomas Schott, Historian, Office of Air Force History, Oklahoma Office, February 10, 1982.

Dr. Roger Spiller, Associate Professor and Command Historian, U. S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, February 8, 1982.

Articles:

Life. March 30, 1942, August 10, 1942, March 15, 1943, April 12, 1943.

Newsweek. April 6, 1942, July 6, 1942, July 26, 1942, March 22, 1943.

Reader's Digest. June 1942.

Time. February 9, 1942, February 16, 1942, June 8, 1942.

Franklin Parish Records:

Franklin Parish Conveyance Records

Franklin Parish Tax Records

Miscellany:

Flying Tigers Vertical File, Louisiana Room, LSU, Baton Rouge Library.

LSU Register of Cadets, 1909. Department of Archives and Manuscripts, LSU, Baton Rouge Library.

Biographical and statistical data on Chennault supplied by his brother, Ernest N. Chennault. Copy located in Chennault House National Register file, Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office.

GILBERT VIC., LOUISIANA

NOTE: SITE BOUNDARIES  
PARALLEL BLDG. FACADES  
AT DISTANCES SHOWN.

