

Biography
Colonel L. Fletcher Prouty,
U.S. Air Force, Retired

Colonel Prouty's experience and background can best be summed up in one word --- special. Since his earliest days in the service --- Army ROTC at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst --- Prouty's career has been distinguished by unusual and difficult assignments and, most importantly, by extraordinary accomplishments. At U Mass, his first days in the military were spent in the Cavalry. In 1939, Prouty was part of a 42 man/horse unit which made the last long Cavalry march --- 650 miles round trip --- through Western Massachusetts to Northwestern Vermont.

In June of 1941, Prouty transferred to the Armored Force, and less than a year after Pearl Harbor --- in November of '42 --- he had graduated flight training school. By 1943, Prouty was a member of the Africa Middle East Wing, Air Transport Command, and was Chief Pilot in Casablanca. Within twelve months, Prouty was assigned as Chief Pilot to the largest Air Transport Command Base --- Cairo. Throughout 1944, Prouty earned his title as Chief Pilot with numerous special missions. The life or death importance of these special missions, and the overwhelming success with which they were executed, became the then Captain Prouty's calling cards.

These special missions were not simply "shoot'em downs." They were always sensitive, tricky, and quasi-diplomatic in nature. One of the earlier missions in 1944 was the rescue of 700 B17 crew members and pilots in Poltava, Russia. This was followed by another special mission into Turkey to rescue the British commandos who had succeeded in thwarting the Germans at the Bosphorus by destroying the Guns of Navaronne. The remainder of the year was highlighted by once again flying into Turkey, this time to break up a ring smuggling gold out of Germany. This was a much heralded mission in that it resulted in the arrest of several Americans, among them the Hollywood actor, Bruce Cabot. As the war began to swing in favor of the Allies, Prouty was once again assigned an important rescue mission. This time, he commanded the rescue operation which brought out 350 U.S., British, and Bulgarian pilots who had been shot down in Allied air raids over the German occupied Romanian oil fields at Ploesti.

The following year, Prouty was transferred to the Pacific, and was among the first three American crews to land in Japan, at Atsugi, shortly after the Japanese surrender. From Japan, Prouty was assigned to Yale University, where he inaugurated the first Air Force ROTC Program. In 1948, Prouty's Air Science & Aeronautics was an official USAF college text. By 1949, his Guided Missiles had been added to USAF standard college reading.

In 1950, Prouty was with the first cadre to establish the North American Air Defense Command. This duty was followed by several intensive courses of study in nuclear warfare. And by the end of that year, Prouty had graduated from Air Command & Staff School. Throughout the next few years and until December 1954, Prouty was stationed in the Far East, first as Manager of Tokyo International Airport --- a military assignment at that time --- and then as Commander of the 99th Air Transport Squadron, Tokyo.

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In 1955, Prouty graduated Armed Forces Staff College. He was immediately assigned to Headquarters, U.S. Air Force, at the Pentagon. There he was assigned the task of establishing the Air Force Focal Point Office for the CIA.* A CIA Focal Point Office is simply that --- one security-tight office to which the Agency exclusively turns when it needs assistance from any of the armed forces. In 1960, Colonel Prouty was awarded the Legion of Merit by General John Gerhart (Deputy Chief of Staff, Plans & Operations; Headquarters, Air Force). Prouty played an instrumental role in supplying key services for CIA operations in the Far East, thus avoiding the overthrow of the government of Thailand. That year, Prouty also received commendations from Allen Dulles and General C.P. Cabell. It was also in 1960 that Prouty's duties were expanded to encompass all service branches. From this assignment at the office of Secretary of Defense, Prouty was reassigned in 1962 to the office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as All Services Focal Point Officer for the CIA.

In 1963, after 23 years in the service, Colonel L. Fletcher Prouty retired. Over the years, Prouty has distinguished himself in banking marketing with several well-known banking institutions in Washington, DC. In 1973, Prouty's book, The Secret Team, was published by Prentice-Hall. During the following year, the book appeared in paperback, published by Ballantine Books. The Secret Team is an account of Prouty's military efforts in conjunction with the CIA. Prouty's work has been published in numerous magazines and journals, including: NEW REPUBLIC, AIR FORCE MAGAZINE, WASHINGTON MONTHLY, AMERICAN BANKERS ASSOCIATION, and the HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW. Fletcher Prouty has also been the National Affairs Editor for GALLERY Magazine since August, 1975.

Prouty has appeared on numerous national and international, TV and radio programs, including work with the Huntley & Brinkley team at NBC-TV, a one-hour documentary for CBC-TV (Canada), a six-program series for BBC-TV (British), as well as a ninety-minute special for Public Broadcasting. Recently, Prouty has appeared on special programs with Granada TV (England) and the Australian Broadcasting Commission. Prouty continues to lecture and write, and still resides in the Washington area, where he enjoys piano, oil painting, and gardening.

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* *The following paragraphs have been quoted here to demonstrate the early beginnings of the Focal Point Offices. The quote was obtained from The Final Report by the Select on Intelligence Activities - U.S. Senate, April 23, 1976 (Book IV, page 50).*

Until 1955, no formal approval mechanism existed outside the agency (CIA) for Covert Action Projects. Since 1948, when covert action was first authorized, senior State Department and Defense Department officials were designated to provide only loose policy guidance to CIA --- with the assumption that covert operations would be infrequent. As covert activities proliferated, loose understandings, rather than specific review, formed the basis for the CIA's accountability for covert operations.

Following the Korean War, the Defense Department's role in relation to covert action became more one of providing physical support to the agency's paramilitary operations. Liaison between DOD and CIA was not channeled through lower levels but was handled by a designated DOD representative. For several years, there was some tension between the two agencies, because the Defense Department official was not trusted by senior agency personnel. In 1957, he was dismissed, and his replacement was able to ease relations between the two agencies.