

AIR AMERICA: DE HAVILLAND CANADA DHC-2 (L-20) BEAVER by Dr. Joe F. Leeker

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Air America's 6 Beavers lined up at Udorn, probably in 1962
(UTD/Fink/ photo no. 1-JF25-16-PB1)

The types of missions flown by Air America's Beavers:

For only a couple of months in 1962, Air America operated some DHC-2 Beavers on loan from the US Army. These Beavers were officially based at Vientiane and maintained by Air America at Udorn. They flew under the provisions of the *Madrider* contract with the USAF (AF62(531)-1674), and 10 Air America pilots were assigned to the Beaver operation (Minutes ExCom-AACL of 23 January 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1); and officially, they were used in Southern Laos to fly around officers of the Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) between March and October 62 (Minutes ExCom-AACL of 27 March 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1). The military advisors who used the Beavers were the US Army White Star Special Forces who were based in multiple locations in Laos (e-mail dated 3 July 2005, kindly sent to the author by Major James MacFarlane). Those advisory teams had already been introduced in Laos already in 1959, when they were technically under the ostensibly civil "Programs Evaluation Office" (PEO), but given considerable autonomy under their overall commander Col. Arthur "Bull" Simons (Conboy/Morrison, *Shadow war*, p.21). In April 61, PEO was authorized to operate openly as a uniformed MAAG, and at the same time, the various Special Forces teams who had previously been known by code-names like "Foretell" or "Monkhood" were designated "White Star Mobile Training Teams". White Star advisors, about 150 men divided into 12 different teams, were engaged in training the Laotian military as well as the irregular forces in individual weapon instruction and in guerilla or antiguerilla operations, but also in unit training or supervising artillery training, construction projects or logistics (Castle, *At war*, p.32).

"The mission of the Beavers was specifically to support SF in Laos. The planes were based in Udorn. They would fly a variety of supplies to teams to include medical supplies, food, soft drinks, water and beer. [...] At Pakse we had tin roofing we dropped to SF team on Plateau des Bolovens for the locals. It was fun to watch the visual from the sky in Beavers because all the huts in the villages up there suddenly had tin roofs. Yes, we would move SF

teams mostly to Udorn for R&R, to BKK or other places. We would also bring replacement SF troops into Laos from Udorn. For the SF we would drop rice to pro western Laotian and Meo troops. The Beavers were not used for operations other than for SF that I ever saw. They did not operate from Long Chien and I don't know of one that ever went in there. Where were the SF bases? Each base probably had a team of 10 to 15 SF and they had maybe 8 locations in Laos but I cannot remember them all. Pakse was one and Sayaboury another. There was another in the first major town east of VTE on the Mekong but I can't recall the name. It had a 4000 foot dirt strip. I think they were also at Luang Prabang and Savannakhet but I'm not sure. Don't recall if I ever took them ammo but most likely yes. Did a medevac on one of them once from Pakse. We could not land on the Plateau des Bolovens so we used to drop to SF up there. It was a gorgeous plateau at about 4000 feet. The Chief pilots of Beaver program that I knew of were Bob Ferguson, ex US Army attache pilot, US Embassy pilot Saigon and John Simons." (e-mail dated 5 July 2005, kindly sent to the author by Major James MacFarlane). Bill Palmer was one of the mechanics who were assigned to service the Beavers working out of Luang Prabang (e-mail dated 6 July 2005, kindly sent to the author by Joe Hazen). "Col. 'Bull' Simons created White Star Laos, but when the program ended it was commanded by a Major Meridith" (e-mail dated 3 July 2005, kindly sent to the author by Major James MacFarlane).

US Army Major James MacFarlane (ret.) recalls: "When the Geneva Accords were signed in late 1962 the Special Forces were removed from Laos and that is what ended the Beaver program. [...] I flew Beavers May to October 1962. Hired by Air Asia Washington DC Office (back room of CAT office) and assigned to Air America based Udorn, Thailand. [...] I flew the Special Forces team out of Pakse (withdrawal per Geneva Accords) but they had me fly over the plateau there to take photos in the event they had to parachute in again...(October 62). The station chief there at Pakse CIA was Ed Hall. He later returned to Northeast Airlines as a pilot" (e-mail dated 3 July 2005, kindly sent to the author by Major James MacFarlane). In October 62, the Beaver operations were completely withdrawn (Minutes ExCom-AACL of 30 October 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1). For some time, the decision of what to do with the aircraft was postponed, but when it became evident that the Helio Courier could do the same job, the aircraft were returned to the US Army. Probably for many years, however, Air America's facility at Udorn maintained a MAP Beaver operating for the Royal Laotian Air Force; three aircraft have been identified.

Statistics according to official Air America documents:

7 DHC Beavers (L-20) were operated for MAAG (Minutes ExCom-AACL of 27 March 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1) in southern Laos

The individual aircraft histories:

Type	registration / serial	c/n (msn)	date acquired	origin
DHC-2 (L-20)	L-201	827	1 March 62	leased from US Army 54-1689

Service history: arrived at Bangkok in crates on 15 February 62, to be operated under the Madriver Contract AF62(531)-1674, based at Vientiane, but maintained at Udorn (Minutes ExCom-AACL of 23 January 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1); assembled by Thai Airways according to contract no. BKK 62-001 (Memorandum dated 9 February 62, in: UTD/Fink/B2F16); officially received at Bangkok on 1 March 62 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept.1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1).

Fate: was to be returned to the US Army in October 62 (Minutes ExCom-AACL of 30 October 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1); returned on 21 April 63 (Aircraft list of June 62,

corrected to Sept.1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); fate unknown.

DHC-2 (L-20) L-202 833 1 March 62 leased from US Army 54-1693

Service history: arrived at Bangkok in crates on 15 February 62, to be operated under the Madriver Contract AF62(531)-1674, based at Vientiane, but maintained at Udorn (Minutes ExCom-AACL of 23 January 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1); assembled by Thai Airways according to contract no. BKK 62-001 (Memorandum dated 9 February 62, in: UTD/Fink/B2F16); officially received at Bangkok on 1 March 62 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept.1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1).

Fate: was to be returned to the US Army in October 62 (Minutes ExCom-AACL of 30 October 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1); returned on 21 April 63 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept.1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); sold to R. N. Nelson Earth Movers as N5220G in March 92; sold to Kenmore Air Harbor Inc, Kenmore, WA, in 92; sold to San Francisco Seaplane Tours, Mill Valley, CA, on 13 July 94; current in March 2004 (request submitted to the FAA on 13 March 2004 at <http://162.58.35.241/acdatabase/>); current in November 2008 (request submitted to the FAA on 23 Nov. 2008 at <http://162.58.35.241/acdatabase/>).

DHC-2 (L-20) L-203 1112 1 March 62 leased from US Army 56-0389

Service history: arrived at Bangkok in crates on 15 February 62, to be operated under the Madriver Contract AF62(531)-1674, based at Vientiane, but maintained at Udorn (Minutes ExCom-AACL of 23 January 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1); assembled by Thai Airways according to contract no. BKK 62-001 (Memorandum dated 9 February 62, in: UTD/Fink/B2F16); officially received at Bangkok on 1 March 62 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept.1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1).

Fate: was to be returned to the US Army in October 62 (Minutes ExCom-AACL of 30 October 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1); returned on 21 April 63 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept.1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); fate unknown.

DHC-2 (L-20) L-204 1157 1 March 62 leased from US Army 56-0409

Service history: arrived at Bangkok in crates on 15 February 62, to be operated under the Madriver Contract AF62(531)-1674, based at Vientiane, but maintained at Udorn (Minutes ExCom-AACL of 23 January 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1); assembled by Thai Airways according to contract no. BKK 62-001 (Memorandum dated 9 February 62, in: UTD/Fink/B2F16); officially received at Bangkok on 1 March 62 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept.1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1).

Fate: was to be returned to the US Army in October 62 (Minutes ExCom-AACL of 30 October 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1); returned on 26 January 63 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept.1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); fate unknown; by 1998 was N81487 with Kenmore Air Harbor Inc, Kenmore, WA; not current in 2008 (request submitted to the FAA on 23 Nov. 2008 at <http://162.58.35.241/acdatabase/>).

DHC-2 (L-20) L-205 1167 1 March 62 leased from US Army 56-0414

Service history: arrived at Bangkok in crates on 15 February 62, to be operated under the Madriver Contract AF62(531)-1674, based at Vientiane, but maintained at Udorn (Minutes ExCom-AACL of 23 January 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1); assembled by Thai

Airways according to contract no. BKK 62-001 (Memorandum dated 9 February 62, in: UTD/Fink/B2F16); officially received at Bangkok on 1 March 62 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept.1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1).

Fate: was to be returned to the US Army in October 62 (Minutes ExCom-AACL of 30 October 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1); returned on 21 April 63 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept.1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); stored at Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ, from 13 January 74 to 12 July 75; sold to Amigos Internacionales Corp., Athens, TX, as N48229 in 1976 (*US Register Review*, 77, p.115); sold to Culwell & Son, Dallas, TX, as N123MC on 31 July 93 (AMCAR 58, Nov. 93, p.48); regd. to Charles W. Culwell, Dallas, TX, in September 94; rereg. as N5CC on 12 September 95 (AMCAR 65, Dec.95, p.37); regd. on 24 November 95 (AMCAR 66, March 96, p.40); current in March 2004 (request submitted to the FAA on 13 March 2004 at <http://162.58.35.241/acdatabase/>); sold to ALS Aviation Llc, Culver City, CA, on 13 December 2007 (request submitted to the FAA on 23 Nov. 2008 at <http://162.58.35.241/acdatabase/>).

DHC-2 (L-20) L-206 1202 1 March 62 leased from US Army 57-2561

Service history: arrived at Bangkok in crates on 15 February 62, to be operated under the Madriver Contract AF62(531)-1674, based at Vientiane, but maintained at Udorn (Minutes ExCom-AACL of 23 January 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1); assembled by Thai Airways according to contract no. BKK 62-001 (Memorandum dated 9 February 62, in: UTD/Fink/B2F16); officially received at Bangkok on 1 March 62 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept.1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); a power plant malfunction resulted in loss of control on take-off from an airstrip in Laos on 12 August 62 (Aircraft accidents 1962, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2); repaired.

Fate: was to be returned to the US Army in October 62 (Minutes ExCom-AACL of 30 October 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1); returned on 21 April 63 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept.1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); canx from the military roster in November 74; sold to Airspan Flight Charter Ltd as C-GASF in November 74 (*Aviation Letter*, no. 99, p.11); sold to West Coast Air Services, Vancouver, BC, in 1978; became part of Air B.C., Vancouver, on 1 December 80; used on floats; current 1982-84; leased to Trans-Provincial Airlines, Prince Rupert, BC, in 1985; sold to Trans-Provincial Airlines, Prince Rupert, BC, in October 86; regd. to Jim Pattison Industries Ltd., Prince Rupert, BC, on 9 October 86; current in 1986; sold to Pacific Coastal Airlines, Nanaimo, BC, on 6 September 89; at Vancouver on 16 August 97 in amphibian configuration, based at Port Hardy, BC; current in 2001; sold as RP-C-58 in 2002 ? (AMCAR, 94, June 2003, p.58).

DHC-2 (L-20) L-207 661 1 March 62 leased from US Army 53-2845

Service history: arrived at Bangkok in crates on 15 February 62, to be operated under the Madriver Contract AF62(531)-1674, based at Vientiane, but maintained at Udorn (Minutes ExCom-AACL of 23 January 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1); assembled by Thai Airways according to contract no. BKK 62-001 (Memorandum dated 9 February 62, in: UTD/Fink/B2F16); officially received at Bangkok on 1 March 62 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept.1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1).

Fate: crashed near Sam Thong (LS-20), Laos, at Xieng Dat (LS-26) on 6 April 62, in a take-off accident resulting from an insufficient runway and killing the pilots (William H. Beale Jr. and George A. Varney) and 2 MAAG soldiers; the aircraft was

too heavy hit a tree stump at the right side of the runway on take-off roll, cartwheeled, burst into flames and killed all on board (Memorial; Memorial file, in: UTD/LaShomb/B16F3; List "Aircraft destroyed or lost", in: UTD/CIA/B49F2; Aircraft accidents 1962, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2; e-mail dated 5 July 2005, kindly sent to the author by Major James MacFarlane; e-mails dated 6 July 2005, kindly sent to the author by Joe Hazen).

DHC-2 (L-20) L-208 881 6 June 62 leased from US Army 54-1729

Service history: received at Bangkok on 6 June 62 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept.1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); operated on the Madriver Contract AF62(531)-1674, based at Vientiane, but maintained at Udorn (Minutes ExCom-AACL of 23 January 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1); suffered from structural fatigue failure of the fuselage in the area of empennage in Laos on 14 September 62 (Aircraft accidents 1962, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2); repaired.

Fate: was to be returned to the US Army in October 62 (Minutes ExCom-AACL of 30 October 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1); returned on 26 January 63 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept.1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); sold as N5354G in September 77; crashed at Kodiak, AK, on 13 July 89 (AMCAR, 93, March 2003, p.59).

Accidents:

- there was one L-20 Beaver accident at Sayaboury (L-23), Laos, in 1962; a photo can be seen on the video tape made by Ed Eckholdt (at 1.35.32 minutes)
- photos of unknown L-20 Beavers at Hua Moung (LS-58) are on the video tape by Ed Eckholdt (at 1.13.50-56 minutes)

Air America also maintained DHC-2 Beavers of the **Royal Laotian Air Force**.

Known aircraft are:



RLAF DHC-2 Beaver 828/J at Vientiane on 27 April 60
(UTD/Kirkpatrick, slide A 5244)

DHC-2 (L-20) "828 / J" 369? 56? ex US Army 51-16828??

Service history: a slide taken at Vientiane on 27 April 60 is Kirkpatrick A 5244.

Fate: unknown; not current on 1 April 72 (Distribution List of 1 April 72, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2).

DHC-2 (L-20) “16782” 229 56? ex US Army 51-16782

Service history: a photo of RLAF DHC-2 “16782” taken in the early sixties was published in the *Indochina database, Laos 1*, at http://www.acig.org/artman/publish/article_412.shtml

Fate: unknown; not current on 1 April 72 (Distribution List of 1 April 72, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2).

DHC-2 (L-20) “82046” 1378 ? ex US Army 58-2046

Service history: seen at Savannakhet on 16 October 65 by Jon Pote; olive drab, messy (List of aircraft seen by Dr. Jonathan Pote in Laos, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 8 August 2008 by Dr. Pote).

Fate: unknown; not current on 1 April 72 (Distribution List of 1 April 72, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2).



RLAF / MAP DHC-2 Beaver 82052, taken somewhere in Laos in the mid-sixties
(UTD/Kirkpatrick/B8F4)

DHC-2 (L-20) “82052” 1384 ? ex US Army 58-2052

Service history: a photo taken in the mid-sixties is preserved in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B8F4; at Savannakhet as “2052” on 8 September 65, grey overall, based at Vientiane; seen at Thakhek West on 22 February 66 and at Savannakhet on 2 May 66, less rudder and elevator (List of aircraft seen by Dr. Jonathan Pote in Laos, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 8 August 2008 by Dr. Pote).

Fate: unknown; not current on 1 April 72 (Distribution List of 1 April 72, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2).



RLAF DHC-2 “82053” at Thakhek West, November 1965, taken by Dr. Jonathan Pote
(with kind permission from Dr. Jonathan Pote)

DHC-2 (L-20) “82053” 1385 ? ex US Army 58-2053

Service history: based at Thakhek West in November 65, carried 0.5 machine gun in port cabin door plus 4 small bomb racks under wings (List of aircraft seen by Dr. Jonathan Pote in Laos, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 8 August 2008 by Dr. Pote); current on 1 April 72 (Distribution List of 1 April 72, in: UTD/CIA/ B49F2); this is believed to be the U-6 that was assigned to contract USAID-439-342 for operation by Air America in the FY 72 Programs (in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F6); current at least from January 72 to June 73 (Lists of assigned / maintained aircraft as of 1 January 72 to 1 June 73, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 reel 23/4).

Fate: returned to the US Army; sold to A. J. Robinson, Campbell River, BC, as C-GUVJ in April 78; sold to Steven M. Brewer, Biglake, AK, as N577V in July 93; regd. to Thomas E. Ingstad, Fargo, ND, as on 26 August 2003; current in March 2004 (request submitted to the FAA on 13 March 2004 at <http://162.58.35.241/acdatabase/>); sold to Western Adventure Seaplane Inc, Missoula, MT, on 25 October 2007 (request submitted to the FAA on 23 Nov. 2008 at <http://162.58.35.241/acdatabase/>).

Problems:

An unknown ex-Air America U-6 Beaver was reportedly noted stored in a revetment at Bien Hoa Air Base, Vietnam, in 1998 (*Air-Britain News*, August 99, p.1035). As no U-6s were operated by Air America at the fall of South Vietnam, it is likely that this was another type of aircraft (PC-6, U-17, O-1). The most likely candidate is former Air America PC-6C N153L, the only operational PC-6C that had been abandoned at Tan Son Nhut airport on 29 April 75 (“Saigon Post Evacuation Report – Ground Maintenance” of 28 May 75, p.1, in: UTD/CIA/B18F7).