

# Missions to Tibet

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Last updated on 1 June 2009

When Communist China invaded Tibet in August 1950, the Dalai Lama was allowed to remain on the throne, but some of his guard fled as refugees to India, Nepal and northern Thailand. Others, the valiant Khampa horsemen, banded together to form the National Volunteer Defense Army of Tibet, sworn to serve and protect the Dalai Lama. As fighting continued in Tibet throughout the fifties, the resistance leaders – among them the eldest brother of the Dalai Lama – requested the help of the US government. So US President Eisenhower approved the provision of covert help by the CIA. The CIA decided to train some of those Tibetans as guerrillas, to equip them with modern weapons and to send them back into Tibet either on foot or by parachute drop. Once they were in Tibet, they were supported with food and ammunition by air drops (Operation *STBarnum*).



B-17G 44-85531 disguised as “639”, taken at Clark in the fall of 1957 by Merle C. Olmsted (with kind permission from Merle C. Olmsted)

In the summer of 1957, the first six Tibetans selected by resistance leaders in northern India were trained at a secret CIA base at Saipan and then taken to Okinawa for parachute training. In mid-September 57, a B-17 which had been stripped of all weapons and national markings, painted black, and modified with engine mufflers to shield the exhaust, and which belonged to Western Enterprises, a front for the CIA air fleet based on Taiwan,<sup>1</sup> was flown to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines to pick up and train the Polish air crew from Wiesbaden, code named “Ostiary”, that was to make the first infiltration flight into Tibet. In

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<sup>1</sup> For Western Enterprises see: Hagedorn / Hellström, *Foreign Invaders*, pp.169/70; Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, pp.37/8, 55, and 58. Leary (*Secret missions to Tibet*, p.64) and Trest (*Air Commando One*, p.91) state that it was a CAT B-17, but probably, CAT leased one of Western Enterprises' B-17s in 1952 for overflights over China, before CAT's first C-54 B-1002 arrived in December 52.

early October 57, the B-17 crewed by the “Ostuary” group carried the Tibetans from Kadena, Okinawa, to Kurmitola, an emergency Strategic Air Command recovery field outside of Dacca in East Pakistan.<sup>2</sup> The following day, all of them boarded the B-17, which dropped the Tibetans to a large sandbar in the Brahmaputra River south of Lhasa.<sup>3</sup> In the same way, the next three Tibetans were dropped near a resistance force in the province of Kham in eastern Tibet in the first week of November 57.<sup>4</sup> The aircraft – Boeing B-17G 44-85531, c/n 8440 – was mostly flown as “531”, but sometimes it was painted as “639” – probably that fake tail number was used during the missions into Tibet in order to make the aircraft non-attributable. It was last flown in December 57 and then put into storage at Clark AFB where it was photographed in June 1958 by Merle C. Olmsted. When it was at Clark, it bore USAF insignia, probably in order to avoid attention.<sup>5</sup> Its ultimate fate is unknown, but it was probably scrapped. Merle C. Olmsted recalls: “After it went into storage, I remember we got orders from USAF to remove the windshield assembly and other parts, which we did. I assume they went somewhere to go on another B-17. I think the airplane was still there when I left.”<sup>6</sup> The salvage of the B-17 began in March 58 (removal of windshield and carburetors), when it had a total of 2,000 hours on it, and the remains of the aircraft were still at Clark in October 58.<sup>7</sup>

When CAT took over the job in January 1958, they first sent in one of their C-54s,<sup>8</sup> but this mission nearly ended in a disaster. Then, still in early 1958,<sup>9</sup> an unmarked USAF C-118A

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<sup>2</sup> Roger E. McCarthy, the CIA Case Officer who trained the first six Tibetans on Saipan in the summer of 1957 and was directly involved in their return by parachute into Tibet in the fall of that year, points out the multitude of problems that had to be resolved along that way: “This required the coordination and efforts of a select few people located in many areas and in a variety of activities, ranging from locating staging areas, selection of drop zones in Tibet, flight routes, outfitting the trainees for their return to Tibet, to developing a personnel parachute and cargo parachutes and delivery techniques equal to the demands of high altitudes, to appropriate clearance approvals not only from our own government but those of other governments such as East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and Thailand, etc.” (Letter by Roger E. McCarthy to Jim Keck, details kindly forwarded to the author by Jim Keck with kind permission from Roger McCarthy).

<sup>3</sup> This first flight into Tibet is described in: Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, pp.59-64. As Roger McCarthy states, “the first aircraft used in the overflight portion of the operation was a B-17 flown by a European crew. Parachute drops were made from the “joe hole” in the belly of the aircraft, and the Tibetans made practice jumps from it on Okinawa. Jim McElroy and Roger McCarthy made extensive modifications to the T-10-parachute, including test drops at Atsugi AFB in Japan, and developed the drop techniques for the cargo and personnel drops from the B-17. The B-17 was used on two flights in the fall of 1957 to infiltrate two teams of Tibetans and their equipment onto the drop zones selected by the respective team members. Staging involved support by Air Force Det.2 at Kadena, then under the command of Art Dietrich, who left no stone unturned to provide excellent support to the operation. Major Robert Kleyla, who had previous B-17 experience, helped provide crew training and flew the B-17, with the six Tibetans aboard to the staging area at Kermitola” (Letter by Roger E. McCarthy to Jim Keck, details kindly forwarded to the author by Jim Keck with kind permission from Roger McCarthy).

<sup>4</sup> For the November 57 flight see: Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, p.65.

<sup>5</sup> E-mail dated 15 February 2004, kindly sent to the author by Leif Hellström.

<sup>6</sup> E-mail dated 21 March 2004, kindly sent to the author by Merle C. Olmsted.

<sup>7</sup> E-mail dated 26 March 2004, kindly sent to the author by Merle C. Olmsted.

<sup>8</sup> Roger McCarthy, letter dated 19 February 1993 sent to Prof. William M. Leary, in: UTD/Leary/I B8F14.

<sup>9</sup> Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, p.75, state that the first C-118A drop into Tibet was only in mid-October 58, but Jim Keck remembers to have flown in the C-118 that was forced down over Armenia in June 58: “We had a favorite plane that Det.2 always gave us. It had low time engines, good fuel economy, and carried very few ‘squawks’. It had many of the part numbers removed or modified so that it might not be traced if captured. There was a small metal frame (about 12 inches square) on the side of the body, near the rear door. We used to put different country’s flags into this frame as needed. Usually on an over-flight we would be ‘bare’. [...] On that C-118, our favorite, I taped up a pin-up girl from an issue of playboy, right next to my Nav. Station. As everyone left the cockpit after a mission, they would stop, say thanks and give her ‘pats’ on her butt. As I was always the last to leave I always gave her a special thanks and a thankful pat. The Air Force used these airplanes during the rest of the month, when we weren’t flying missions, on various other flights. Nobody ever miss handled ‘our gal’. One day and stormy night Det. 2 had a flight from Kadena to somewhere along the Turkey-Russian border. The weather was poor. And a fake Russian radio station put out a really strong signal. They

belonging to the special cell (Detachment 1) of the former 322<sup>nd</sup> TCS of Kadena, Okinawa, by then renamed Detachment 2, 313<sup>th</sup> Air Division,<sup>10</sup> was bailed to CAT<sup>11</sup> to continue these missions as well as for airdrops of arms and other material to the Tibetan resistance groups. Former USAF pilot Lawrence Ropka, who flew those C-118As out of Kadena, Okinawa, since the fall of 1957, recalls that the unit's operations office was in a Quonset Hut. In the back of the hut was a small room, portioned off, that contained two "Air Force" officers. He soon learned that there were certain pilots in the unit who flew C-118s and were considered a "semi-elite." After a couple of months, he was invited into the back room to sign a secrecy agreement, after which he flew to some "strange places".<sup>12</sup> Around January 58, a fighter pilot from Tokyo, Colonel John W. Weltman, turned up at the 322<sup>nd</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron (Medium Special) at Kadena, Okinawa. "He took a C-118 crew to Clark, where they ran the first mission to Tibet. There was a little house on the edge of Clark Field which contained a communications room. [Lawrence] Ropka was not allowed inside the room, but he would be given long telexes from SAC Weather Control. He also had some photographs, which he used to designate the drop zone. He then worked out a route backwards from DZ, using old WAC charts. They all spent the afternoon with paint remover, trying to take the USAF marking off the C-118. It proved to be quite a job. In fact, they missed the first day on the moon phase. On the second day, a CAT crew (Doc Johnson?) flew the mission."<sup>13</sup>

Jim Keck, Navigator of the very first C-118A drop mission, remembers: "We got over the D.Z. and we were between layers of clouds. The pilot, Doc Johnson, kept turning in a circle with his wing low in the turn. The C-118 has only weather type radar and in a steep turn my radar scope only paints part of the screen. That part that's on the inside of the turn. The picture becomes distorted and you can't rely upon it until you roll out straight and level. As I couldn't be of any help on the radar I asked the Flight Engineer, Bill Lively, to fold up his seat and I'll come up and help look for the drop zone lights. It was my very first overflight and I had my seat pack type parachute on at all times. The first thing that happened was that I got the chute stuck in the small opening between the two pilots. [...] Lively unhooked me and I slipped forward so that I could see out of the windows. We had been in a steady turn for several minutes now. [...] We broke out of the clouds and directly straight-ahead we saw

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believe that's what happened. Anyway they crashed and I think our little pin up is on the wall of some dirt shack, high in the Russian Mountains" (Letter dated 10 July 2001, written by Jim Keck to the author). As the crews were never allowed to log any flight time for these flights nor to make any photos, there are no written records about the aircraft used, as Jim Keck points out. However the fact that their favorite C-118 went down in Russia allows to identify this particular aircraft: The USAF C-118 that was forced down by Russian fighters over Armenia on 27 June 58 was 51-3822 (c/n 43569) (Eastwood / Roach, *Piston Engine Airliner Production List*, p.336). It returned to Okinawa only in January 60 (Interview conducted by Prof. William Leary with Lawrence Ropka at Ft Walton Beach, FL, on 29-30 August 1990, transcript preserved at: UTD/Leary/I B12F2), when Air America did no longer use USAF C-118As. While 51-3822 was in Russia, another C-118 was used for the overflights over Tibet, until it was finally replaced by C-130As. This C-118A was most probably Douglas C-118A N6184M (c/n 43567, ex 51-3820); although it may have been returned to the USAF as 51-3820 by July 59, it is not listed on the microfilms of the AFHRA between July 64 and early 1967; then it appears on microfilm no. AVH-6 as returned from outside the USAF (code "GI") on 67090, that is on 31 March 67; at that date, it was assigned to the 1045<sup>th</sup> Operational Evaluation & Training Group, Headquarters Command, Eglin, that is to the unit that really ran the Tibetan missions.

<sup>10</sup> Only that Kadena-based special cell (Detachment 1) of the 322<sup>nd</sup> TCS survived, when the 322<sup>nd</sup> TCS itself ceased to exist in November 57 (Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, p.271, note 17).

<sup>11</sup> The USAF insignia on these aircraft were decals, "the plastic kind with the sticky backs. That [...] Air Force captain that usually came with the airplane to Kermitola always produced a set for the flight back to Clark" (E-mail dated 29 March 2002, sent by former CAT mechanic Bill Lively to former CAT/Air America Chief Navigator Jim Keck, kindly forwarded to the author by Jim Keck with kind permission from Bill Lively).

<sup>12</sup> Interview conducted by Prof. William Leary with Lawrence Ropka at Ft Walton Beach, FL, on 29-30 August 1990, transcript preserved at UTD/Leary/I B12F2).

<sup>13</sup> Interview conducted by Prof. William Leary with Lawrence Ropka at Ft Walton Beach, FL, on 29-30 August 1990, transcript preserved at UTD/Leary/I B12F2).

several huge snow covered mountains higher than we were. [...] I asked Doc to roll out straight and level as soon as he could, so I could use my radar. When he did, I was able to get a good fix from a mountain peak and gave him a new heading back to the D.Z. As we rolled out on this new heading, the clouds parted and we could see the ground. The co-pilot, Al Judkins, gave me several visual sightings and we made it to the drop zone. Those five fires looked wonderful!”<sup>14</sup> The next flight was a month later, when the next moon phase came back. On a later flight, the static line cable ripped loose from its front anchor plate, malfunctioned and required multiple passes to complete the drop. “Yes, we most likely spread that load over a couple of miles, but there was nothing else we could do”, Jim Keck remembers who helped the kickers on that flight, but from the following flight on, a new “A” frame type anchor was installed.<sup>15</sup>

“During 1958, Ropka would be assigned to the project every month during the moon phase for 6 months of the wet season. They operated out of Clark for a couple of months, then moved to Takhli (the C-118 had to make a refueling stop out of Clark at Dacca). There was nothing at Takhli except a long SAC recovery runway and jet fuel. The Thais provided a guest house. There were two hangars. The Thais turned over to the USAF. One side was cleaned out and rooms were put in for operations and communications. They had to take everything that they needed from Okinawa in one airplane. They used the C-118 for most of the year, then got C-130As out of the 315<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Wing on Okinawa.”<sup>16</sup> Similar CAT / Air America-piloted C-118A flights to Tibet are known to have taken place in mid-October 58, in November 58 (when Air America was still called Civil Air Transport Inc.), in mid-April 59 (after the company had been renamed Air America), in mid-May 59, and in June 59.<sup>17</sup> “Things changed a bit in 1959. Weltman left and was replaced by his deputy, Art Dietrich. The operation had been run from Tokyo, with operating elements on Okinawa. The Tokyo office was closed and Okinawa became the Asian Air Office. [...] The Agency set up Detachment 2 as an all-detailee operation (formerly the detailees had been a cell inside the 322<sup>nd</sup>). [...] Things were sort of ‘bumping along’ in Det.2 when Aderholt arrived in January 1960 ‘and turned our world upside down’. Ropka had been in the US when Aderholt arrived, picking up a second C-118 in Baltimore. (It had been used in Europe and was the airplane that had gone into Russia with CIA men and been forced down).”<sup>18</sup>

Most people would think that on those thirteen-hour flights celestial navigation, that is measuring the height of the sun, moon, stars and planets, was used to find the drop zone, but Chief Navigator Jim Keck states that he used it very little: “This system works lovely when flying in dark nights over the vast Pacific. [...] But here you are over someone else’s country, everyone’s adrenaline is racing and you must listen to and plot every visual sighting from other crewmembers – it’s just too long to stay away from your navigation station. As a result I would only go to celestial when it was absolutely necessary. There is another reason. To get good celestial results the airplane must be on autopilot. [...] Most sextants will take two minutes to average out the autopilot. When somebody is hand flying, the airplane may be held slightly left wing low for most of the two minutes or it may oscillate back and forth without a constant attitude.”<sup>19</sup> But the C-118As of the same squadron were also used on other flights, as at Kurmitola near Dacca, they also picked up the exfiltrated Tibetans who had trekked down

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<sup>14</sup> Letter dated 12 August 2001 written by Jim Keck to the author.

<sup>15</sup> Letter dated 12 July 1997 written by Jim McElroy, CIA loadmaster in the Tibetan Program, to William Leary; details kindly forwarded to the author by Jim Keck with kind permission from Jim McElroy; and letter dated 12 August 2001, written by Jim Keck to the author.

<sup>16</sup> Interview conducted by Prof. William Leary with Lawrence Ropka at Ft Walton Beach, FL, on 29-30 August 1990, transcript preserved at UTD/Leary/I B12F2).

<sup>17</sup> Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA’s secret war in Tibet*, pp. 74-79; 80-105.

<sup>18</sup> Interview conducted by Prof. William Leary with Lawrence Ropka at Ft Walton Beach, FL, on 29-30 August 1990, transcript preserved at UTD/Leary/I B12F2).

<sup>19</sup> Letter dated 10 July 2001, written by Jim Keck to the author.

from the Himalayas and had been bused from Darjeeling to Dacca by CIA case officers, and flew them to Saipan. At Saipan, the CIA operated a training complex between 1949 and 1962 that was called “Navy Technical Training Unit”, where Chinese Nationalists were trained for assaults on to the Mainland.<sup>20</sup>



An unknown CAT / Air America C-118A at Kurmitola, East Pakistan, in 1958/9  
(with kind permission from Ken Conboy)

Then, in March 1959, a rumor that the Chinese intended to abduct the Dalai Lama created an uprising in Tibet. The revolt was short-lived and ineffective, but, disguised as a soldier, the Dalai Lama was able to flee, with the assistance of one of the CIA-trained radio teams, and was granted political asylum in India, where he arrived with several thousand adherents.<sup>21</sup> Inside Tibet, open war broke out between the Tibetan natives and the Chinese army, and while the Chinese troops frequently crossed the borders of Sikkim, Bhutan and India, resulting in continuous skirmishes, CAT planes further supplied the rebels.<sup>22</sup> In May 59, two months after the escape of the Dalai Lama to India, the Eisenhower administration authorized an expansion of Operation *STBarnum*: A total of 700 Tibetans were to be trained in the isolated old Army base of Camp Hale in central Colorado, the first group of whom arrived in August 59. They were flown to Petersen Field, Colorado, by USAF C-118s or C-124s, from where they were taken to Camp Hale in buses that were blacked out. Already in July 59,<sup>23</sup> the C-118<sup>24</sup> used on the airdrops into Tibet had been definitively replaced by USAF C-130As belonging to the 21<sup>st</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron, which was part of the 483<sup>rd</sup> Troop Carrier Wing, Naha, and then part of the 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division at Tachikawa. But before introducing the

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<sup>20</sup> Note about: E.J. Kahn Jr., *A reporter in Micronesia*, New York 1966, pp.39-40, in: UTD/Leary/I B20F11.

<sup>21</sup> The Dalai Lama left Lhasa on 17 March 59 and arrived in India on 1 April 59 (Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, pp.90-93).

<sup>22</sup> Robbins, *Air America*, pp.90-98; Hagedorn / Hellström, *Foreign Invaders*, pp.169-74; Leary, *Secret mission to Tibet*, pp.62-66; Trest, *Air Commando One*, pp.91/2. Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, mentions 5 C-118s flights into Tibet: in mid-October 58 (p.75), in mid-November 58 (pp.78/9), in mid-April 59 (p.97), in mid-May 59 (p.104), and in June 59 (p.105).

<sup>23</sup> Leary, *Secret mission to Tibet*, p.68; this date fits with the last known C-118A mission which had taken place in June 59. Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, pp.117/8, state that the first C-130 drop of agents into Tibet took place on 18 September 59; Jim Keck states that from his C-130, he observed the convoy of the Dalai Lama going to exile in India (Letter dated 11 September 2002, written by Jim Keck to Tenzin Taklha, Deputy Secretary, Office of the Dalai Lama, kindly forwarded to the author). As the Dalai Lama went into exile in the second half of March 59 (Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, pp.90-93), there must have been at least that March 59 C-130 flight prior to July 59.

<sup>24</sup> When Major Aderholt arrived at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, the 313<sup>th</sup> Air Division's Detachment at Kadena had 2 C-118s and 3 C-54s (Trest, *Air Commando One*, p.85). According to an interview with B.G. Aderholt given to Prof. Bill Leary at Fort Walton Beach, FL, on 28-30 August 1990, Detachment 2 had even 5 C-54s (Interview dated 28-30 August 1990, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F2).

C-130As, CIA-man Gar Thorsrud had to convince the USAF that the C-130s were the right aircraft for the mission, as Air America's Managing Director George A. Doole wanted to use DC-7s, which were available at Southern Air Transport. So Air America pilots William Welk and Doc Johnson ran a profile mission with the DC-7, but the problem was unreliable engines.<sup>25</sup> Because of political sensitivities between Pakistan and India, the staging area for the flights into Tibet was moved from Kurmitola near Dacca to Takhli (T-05) in Thailand at the same time, so that from the beginning of the expanded program in July 59, all C-130A missions were flown out of Takhli. Since that time, Kurmitola was used only as an emergency recovery location for the C-130As. But in spite of this move, the multiple flights made to drop zones in Tibet were not interrupted.<sup>26</sup> At that time, Major Art Dietrich was mission commander on Okinawa. Jim McElroy, CIA loadmaster to the Tibetan program, states that "he did an outstanding job, especially since we had to travel to Takhli Base without the support of a unit like Det.2. The Thai Air Force billeted and fed us the best they could."<sup>27</sup>



An unknown Air America C-130A in 1959-60, after the USAF tail markings had been removed prior to an overflight of Tibet – reportedly taken at Kadena, Okinawa, but probably at Takhli, Thailand (with kind permission from Ken Conboy)

In July 1959, some 20 C-130As belonging to the 483<sup>rd</sup> TCW were based at Naha,<sup>28</sup> and as many different aircraft were used on the airlift,<sup>29</sup> probably all of these 20 C-130As were used at one time or another. The USAF unit that ran the airlift was then upgraded to Detachment 2, 1045<sup>th</sup> Operational Evaluation & Training Group, reporting directly to CIA headquarters,<sup>30</sup> as the command and control of the operation rested completely with and by the CIA in Washington. Drop zones were proposed via clandestine radio communication with the CIA in

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with CIA-man Thomas G. Fosmire conducted by Prof. William Leary at Florence, SC on 28 December 1992, written resume, in: UTD/Leary/I B7F4.

<sup>26</sup> Letter by Roger E. McCarthy to Jim Keck; details kindly forwarded to the author by Jim Keck with kind permission from Roger McCarthy; letter dated 12 August 2001 written to the author by Jim Keck.

<sup>27</sup> Letter dated 12 July 1997 sent by Jim McElroy to William Leary; details kindly forwarded to the author by Jim Keck with kind permission from Jim McElroy.

<sup>28</sup> See the USAF's Assignment Records preserved by the AFHRA at Maxwell AFB, AL; the aircraft are listed in the C-130 file of this database.

<sup>29</sup> Fax dated 14 June 2000, kindly sent to the author by Brigadier General Aderholt.

<sup>30</sup> Trest, *Air Commando One*, p.83. The insignia of Det.2 / 1045<sup>th</sup> OE&TG are depicted in: Conboy / Morrison, *Shadow war*, p.77.

Washington by the Tibetan teams on the ground in Tibet for review and approval by the CIA. The overflight paths in and out of Tibet were also the responsibility of the CIA in Washington. The types and amounts of equipment to be dropped were decided in Washington and coordinated with the CIA's logistical base on Okinawa. The CAT crews and jump masters were briefed and debriefed by CIA officers at the launch and recovery sites. Crew selection for the overflight missions, however, was made by Robert E. Rousselot, Air America's Director of Flight Operations at Taipei.<sup>31</sup> CAT and Air America crew members who flew in the airlift to Tibet included Merrill D. ("Doc") Johnson,<sup>32</sup> A.L. Judkins,<sup>33</sup> Jack Stiles,<sup>34</sup> and William Welk<sup>35</sup> as pilots, Maury Clough<sup>36</sup> as engineer, Bob Aubrey,<sup>37</sup> and Harry Hudson<sup>38</sup> as radio operators, Jim Keck,<sup>39</sup> and then also Leon C. Cartwright,<sup>40</sup> and Cyril ("Pinky") Pinkava,<sup>41</sup> and Thomas G. Sailer,<sup>42</sup> as navigators, Roland H. ("Andy") Anderson,<sup>43</sup> Fred Barnosky,<sup>44</sup> Ray Beasley,<sup>45</sup> William R. Demmons,<sup>46</sup> Darrel ("Yogi") Eubanks,<sup>47</sup> Miles L. Johnson,<sup>48</sup> Thomas G. ("Shep") Johnson,<sup>49</sup> Art Jukkala,<sup>50</sup> John ("Tex") Lewis,<sup>51</sup> Richard A. ("Pete") Peterson,<sup>52</sup> and Ray Shank<sup>53</sup> as Parachute Dispatch Officers (PDO's). Neese D. Hicks first volunteered as a radio operator, but after a few flights he went to Ashiya, checked out on C-130s, and then flew trips to Tibet as a captain.<sup>54</sup> But during the height of operations in the early months of 1960, there were about 12-15 PDO's involved in the operation. Most

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<sup>31</sup> Letter by Roger E. McCarthy, the CIA Case Officer who trained the Tibetans at Saipan, to Jim Keck; information kindly forwarded to the author by Jim Keck with kind permission from Roger McCarthy; letter dated 12 August 2001, written to the author by Jim Keck.

<sup>32</sup> Letter dated 17 January 1992, sent by Miles L. Johnson to Prof. William Leary, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F1.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with A. L. Judkins, conducted by Prof. William Leary on 9 September 1985, written resume, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F1.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Neese D. Hicks, conducted by Prof. William Leary at Ashland, OR, on 3 August 1987, written resume, in: UTD/Leary/I B13F6.

<sup>35</sup> Letter dated 17 January 1992, sent by Miles L. Johnson to Prof. William Leary, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F1.

<sup>36</sup> Letter dated 17 January 1992, sent by Miles L. Johnson to Prof. William Leary, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F1.

<sup>37</sup> Letter dated 17 January 1992, sent by Miles L. Johnson to Prof. William Leary, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F1.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Neese D. Hicks, conducted by Prof. William Leary at Ashland, OR, on 3 August 1987, written resume, in: UTD/Leary/I B13F6.

<sup>39</sup> Letter dated 10 July 2001, written by Jim Keck to the author.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Leon C. Cartwright, conducted by Prof. William Leary on 5 October 1987, written resume, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F1.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Neese D. Hicks, conducted by Prof. William Leary at Ashland, OR, on 3 August 1987, written resume, in: UTD/Leary/I B13F6.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Thomas C. Sailer, conducted by Prof. William Leary at San Francisco on 8 September 1985, written resume, in: UTD/Leary/I B14F6 and UTD/Leary/I B12F1: Tailer flew missions to Tibet in November and December 59 as well as in February, March, and April 1960.

<sup>43</sup> Letter dated 17 January 1992, sent by Miles L. Johnson to Prof. William Leary, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F1.

<sup>44</sup> Letter dated 31 March 1992, sent by Miles L. Johnson to Prof. William Leary, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F1.

<sup>45</sup> Letter dated 31 March 1992, sent by Miles L. Johnson to Prof. William Leary, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F1.

<sup>46</sup> Letter dated 31 March 1992, sent by Miles L. Johnson to Prof. William Leary, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F1.

<sup>47</sup> Letter dated 31 March 1992, sent by Miles L. Johnson to Prof. William Leary, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F1.

<sup>48</sup> Letter dated 17 January 1992, sent by Miles L. Johnson to Prof. William Leary, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F1. Miles Johnson made 15-16 flights to Tibet during the December 59 – April 60 period.

<sup>49</sup> Letter dated 31 March 1992, sent by Miles L. Johnson to Prof. William Leary, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F1. Shep Johnson made 9 flights to Tibet (Telephone interview with Miles L. Johnson conducted by Prof. William Leary on 18 July 1991, written version, at: UTD/Leary/I B13F7).

<sup>50</sup> Letter dated 31 March 1992, sent by Miles L. Johnson to Prof. William Leary, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F1.

<sup>51</sup> Letter dated 31 March 1992, sent by Miles L. Johnson to Prof. William Leary, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F1.

<sup>52</sup> Letter dated 17 January 1992, sent by Miles L. Johnson to Prof. William Leary, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F1. Peterson made 15-16 flights to Tibet (Telephone interview with Miles L. Johnson conducted by Prof. William Leary on 18 July 1991, written version, at: UTD/Leary/I B13F7).

<sup>53</sup> Letter dated 31 March 1992, sent by Miles L. Johnson to Prof. William Leary, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F1.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Neese D. Hicks, conducted by Prof. William Leary at Ashland, OR, on 3 August 1987, written resume, in: UTD/Leary/I B13F6.

flights would carry 3 PDOs, some carried 2, and on one flight there were even 4 PDO's.<sup>55</sup>

For the Air America crews, there was a 24 hours notice. Then they would go to Kadena, receive a briefing there before leaving for Takhli. "There was a system of go-no go messages from headquarters at specific intervals: 24 launch alert, 12 hours, 6 hours, 2 hours, 1 hour, launch. If all was well, the message simply would say AFFIRM. These messages had to arrive for the launch to continue. They came from the Air Branch in Washington."<sup>56</sup> Drops were made upon a ground signal, and the fixed rule was no loitering in the drop zone. At first there were some problems with the cargo doors, but they were soon solved.<sup>57</sup> "By mid-1959, multiple air drops were made in each full moon phase to designated drop zones in Tibet. For example, there were times when air drops were made to a single drop zone by three C-130s flying in tail. In all drops to resistance forces, information was passed to the teams on the ground as to how many bundles were to be dropped. This enabled the teams to have a sufficient number of horses and yaks in place to clear the drop zone expeditiously. In the course of the operation, the cargo bundles were rigged by McElroy in a manner enabling the reception teams to load already slung packs onto the backs of the pack animals, approximately 85 lbs. to a side."<sup>58</sup> When more than one C-130A was used, the lead aircraft of the mission carried a special bundle on the tailgate ramp. This bundle contained special items such as money, radios, instructions, commo plans, etc. for the Agency team on the ground. This bundle was dropped a couple of seconds before the load. An orange and white parachute was used for identification. And indeed, several months no less than 5 C-130As were used on two consecutive nights, three aircraft on the first night and two on the second one, weather permitting. The mission crews would land, debrief, eat, and try to sleep in the hot, humid day, then fly another mission that night.<sup>59</sup> When more than one C-130 was used, the interval between the planes would be about 15 minutes.<sup>60</sup> The CIA even made special leather boots for the Air America crews to wear on these overflights.<sup>61</sup> As to the Tibetans, after a vigorous training program, the first group of them was ready in September 59. They were flown back to the CIA base at Kadena, Okinawa, then on to Takhli in Thailand, from where they were infiltrated into the Nam Tso area of Tibet for sabotage operations on 18 September 59.<sup>62</sup> The main objective of these Tibetans was to mine the two major roads between Tibet and China and to cut communication lines, in order to slow down the flow of Chinese men and material into Tibet. When, in early 1960, USAF Major Harry "Heinie" Aderholt, who, later, was to become responsible for the construction of STOL sites in Laos, had taken over the program, he arranged for the entire unit at Kadena to be detailed to the CIA, not only two commanding officers, and this improved the atmosphere among the staff. One to three USAF C-130As –

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<sup>55</sup> Telephone interview with Miles L. Johnson conducted by Prof. William Leary on 18 July 1991, written version, at: UTD/Leary/I B13F7.

<sup>56</sup> Written resume, p. 3, of an interview with B.G. Aderholt conducted by Prof. Bill Leary at Fort Walton Beach, FL, on 28-30 August 1990 (Interview dated 28-30 August 1990, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F2).

<sup>57</sup> Thomas C. Sailer, interview made with William M. Leary at San Francisco on 8 September 1985; professor Leary's notes, preserved at UTD/Leary/ I B14F6.

<sup>58</sup> Letter by Roger E. McCarthy to Jim Keck; details kindly forwarded to the author by Jim Keck with kind permission from Roger McCarthy.

<sup>59</sup> Letter dated 12 August 2001, written to the author by Jim Keck; and letter by Jim McElroy, dated 12 July 1997; details kindly forwarded to the author by Jim Keck with kind permission from Jim McElroy. Jim McElroy even says: "Several months we were able to fly 6 to 9 missions on consecutive nights", that is 3 aircraft each time flown on two to three consecutive nights.

<sup>60</sup> Letter dated 17 January 1992, sent by Miles L. Johnson to Prof. William Leary, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F1.

<sup>61</sup> In July 2002, former Air America navigator Jim Keck donated a pair of these boots to the Dalai Lama's Tibet Museum in Dharamsala, India (correspondence with the Office of the Dalai lama, kindly forwarded to the author by Jim Keck).

<sup>62</sup> For details of this first infiltration using a C-130, see Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, pp.115-18.

which were always different aircraft<sup>63</sup> – were flown by USAF pilots from Naha Field, Okinawa, to Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, located some 20 miles apart, loaded with cargo (mainly arms and ammunition packaged into individual 80- to 85-pound loads)<sup>64</sup> by personnel of the CIA's main logistics base in East Asia, and then flown to Takhli by Air America crews who were accompanied by pilots from the squadron for monthly currency checks. At Takhli, where Detachment 2 had taken residence in 1960,<sup>65</sup> the C-130As were “sanitized”, i.e. stripped of military markings to make them non-attributable. They were simply identified by codes like “Able flight” or “Baker flight”. When weather conditions at the drop zone allowed the mission, the Tibetans, normally 10-12 for each aircraft, would arrive shortly before departure in the twilight. Then the “quarantined” Air America crews, i.e. crews that had been taken from the normal schedules and given special clearances for clandestine (“black”) missions would fly the C-130As to Tibet and drop the Tibetans and their cargo. “The airplanes would depart in the late afternoon for the 13+ hour flight. They followed a certain route, laid out by [Larry] Ropka, and would send Q signals as they passed over designated checkpoints.”<sup>66</sup> Long range missions with internal Benson tanks<sup>67</sup> could even last 14 hours.<sup>68</sup>

“Aderholt immediately ordered the C-130s stripped of excess weight. He managed to get the payload increased from 12,000 pounds to 28,000 pounds. This was later cut back to 18,000. One plane (Pappy Hayes) was late coming back. He called in 80 miles out that he was low on fuel. There was fog sitting on the runway at Takhli, as it often did. Hayes made a pass but could not find the runway. Aderholt (on hand-held radio) and Ropka went down to the end of the runway and shot off flares. This enabled Hayes to land. Word of the incident soon got back to Dave Fleming and the result was a ‘grand inquisition’. In the end, General Kirshaw reduced the payload to 18,000 pounds, where it stayed.”<sup>69</sup> Generally speaking, as there were no landing strips capable of a C-130A in Tibet, the CIA was unable to retrieve the agents, once they had been parachuted, and sometimes, the extremely long flight caused fuel

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<sup>63</sup> Fax dated 14 June 2000, sent by Brigadier General Aderholt to the author.

<sup>64</sup> Jim McElroy, CIA loadmaster in the Tibetan program who was in charge of the Agency parachute loft and storekeeper for the FE airborne equipment stored at Okinawa, recalls that “each load (24,000-27,000 pounds) consisted of 34 to 40 bundles weighing 675 to 750 pounds. The bundles were loaded equally in two sticks on side by side center guide conveyor systems. The conveyor system had a center guide rail channel to keep the bundles on track. The pallets on the bottom of each bundle had two inline wheels which fit into the guide channel. Each bundle generally contained 8 individual containers weighing 75 to 85 pounds. Cross webbing straps held the containers together and served as a harness for the three nylon 28 foot parachutes used on each bundle. When the webbing straps were removed the container could be handled by one man or loaded on an animal for transport” (Jim McElroy, letter dated 12 July 97, details kindly forwarded to the author by Jim Keck with kind permission from Jim McElroy). “The packages came from the CIA supply facility at Chinan on Okinawa and contained different mixtures of guns, ammo, radios, and other supplies” (Written resume, p. 3, of an interview with B.G. Aderholt conducted by Prof. Bill Leary at Fort Walton Beach, FL, on 28-30 August 1990 (Interview dated 28-30 August 1990, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F2). Jim Keck recalls the first C-130A flight to Tibet: “I would always go back to help out with pushing out the load. As we were not pressurized with the doors open, I would always hook up to a walk around oxygen bottle and clip it on to my flight suit. As the load went out, on that first C-130 flight, I was frightened by the shuddering and ‘bumpy’ vibration of the aircraft. After the mission we tried to figure what had caused this bumping. It was the fact that the pallets had wooden bases and during the flight from Okinawa all the way up to Tibet, the tiny rollers of the track had worn tiny grooves into the wood. As they raced out towards the open door, each groove sort of rattled as the small groove moved over to the next roller. It did vibrate the entire airplane.”

<sup>65</sup> Trest, *Air Commando One*, p.89.

<sup>66</sup> Written resume, p. 3, of an interview with B.G. Aderholt conducted by Prof. Bill Leary at Fort Walton Beach, FL, on 28-30 August 1990 (Interview dated 28-30 August 1990, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F2).

<sup>67</sup> According to Neese D. Hicks, the C-130s sometimes had pylon tanks that carried 300 gallons each and a rubberized Benson tank in the back that held 2,000 gallons (Interview with Neese D. Hicks, conducted by Prof. William Leary at Ashland, OR, on 3 August 1987, written resume, in: UTD/Leary/I B13F6).

<sup>68</sup> Letter dated 17 January 1992 sent by Miles Johnson to Prof. William Leary, at: UTD/Leary/I B12F1.

<sup>69</sup> Interview conducted by Prof. William Leary with Lawrence Ropka at Ft Walton Beach, FL, on 29-30 August 1990, transcript preserved at UTD/Leary/I B12F2).

problems for the return flight, so that the aircraft had to land in East Pakistan. For such cases, Aderholt had always troops on standby at the airfield in East Pakistan. Although such a landing was declared as an emergency landing, the Indians, fearing trouble with China, constantly fussed about these landings. “Aderholt leaned over backwards to appease the crews. They wanted larger parachutes, so he arranged for 34-foot canopies on personnel chutes. Someone at headquarters purchased Hillay’s first set of commercial gear at Abacrombie & Fitch for the crews. There were lots of toys and gimmicks: silenced .38s, emergency rations, gold bars. However, there was no real SAR program.”<sup>70</sup>

“About an hour out of the DZ (drop zone) area we would hook up all the static lines to the static line cables and tape the snaps secure so the exit vibration wouldn’t inadvertently unsnap them. We would check and make sure no loose straps or chains were on the tracks or unsecured. If personnel were involved we would double and triple check their parachutes and equipment. About 15 minutes out we would take off all the chains and stow them out of the way, leaving only the heavy duty nylon shear webs to hold the load in place. About 5 minutes out a red light would go on and the plane would depressurize. At this time we would be hooked up to walk around oxygen bottles, each bottle would be good for about 10 minutes, depending on how heavy it was used. When the pilot turned on the green light and bell, he would nose the plane up and the PDO’s would cut the shear web with a sharp knife and out it would all go. Like a roaring freight train – then all quiet. When personnel and cargo were dropped the cargo would go first and then the men. This all happened within a few seconds. The majority of drops went off very smoothly, but occasionally the door would get jammed or the static lines would get fouled up and couldn’t get them in without a struggle.”<sup>71</sup>

Air America Captain A. L. “Judkins recalls one two-plane mission. He flew with Welk in one aircraft, with Doc Johnson and Jack Stiles in the other. They got lost after the navigator corrected for a non-existent jet stream. Neither aircraft made the drop. Judkins headed south and landed at the emergency field north of Dhacca. It was raining, there were no runway lights, and there was a 30-knot crosswind. A bolt of lightning lit the strip just before landing. The crew had a tough time trying to reapply USAF markings in the rain. Meanwhile, Doc Johnson had gone on to Takhli. The weather was bad, and he had to make several passes before landing with low fuel warning lights on.”<sup>72</sup> Radar operator Leon C. Cartwright also recalls two flights that were memorable: “On one, Johnson and Judkins flew out of Takhli, turning left at Mt. Everest to the IP, then right to the DZ. The altitude was about 20,000 feet. Pinkava was onboard. He went back to deal with problems with the clamshell doors and nearly passed out. Judkins’ windshield cracked, causing him considerable apprehension. On another flight, with Stiles, they almost ran out of gas en route to Takhli. They lost one engine due to fuel starvation, then another as they neared the field, which was obscured by clouds. The decision was to make one pass and crash land if they missed, or to maintain altitude and bail out. At a critical point, someone on the ground fired a flare up through the clouds, giving Stiles his position and enabling him to land.”<sup>73</sup>

When on 1 May 1960, the CIA pilot Francis Gary Powers was shot down in a U-2 near Sverdlovsk in the Soviet Union, all CIA planes were ordered not to violate international borders, and at that time, some 14,000 Tibetans dependent on air support for food, arms and equipment, were left to fend for themselves. Since 18 September 59 (1 C-130A), there had been several C-130A drops – one in the second week of November 59 to Pembar, one in mid-

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<sup>70</sup> Interview conducted by Prof. William Leary with Lawrence Ropka at Ft Walton Beach, FL, on 29-30 August 1990, transcript preserved at UTD/Leary/I B12F2).

<sup>71</sup> Letter dated 17 January 1992, sent by Miles L. Johnson to Prof. William Leary, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F1.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with A. L. Judkins conducted by Prof. William Leary on 9 September 85, written resume, at: UTD/Leary/I B12F1.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Leon C. Cartwright conducted by Prof. William Leary on 5 October 87, written resume, at: UTD/Leary/I B12F1.

December 59 to the same destination, one in January 60, one in February 60, 2 C-130As in mid-March 60, and 2 C-130As in mid-April 59, both of which encountered bad weather, which nearly resulted in accidents. In order to deliver as much equipment as possible before the weather would prove prohibitive, where after deliveries would be possible only in autumn, three C-130A flights were launched on two consecutive nights at the end of the April lunar circle. An emergency delivery had been scheduled for 1 May 60, but was cancelled because of the U-2, which had been shot down.<sup>74</sup> So many of the Tibetan guerrillas were rounded up and killed, while supplies destined for them were held up in Okinawa, Taiwan and Thailand. Between November 1959 and May 1960, some 35 to 40 missions had delivered almost 400 tons of cargo to resistance fighters of Tibet.<sup>75</sup> In May and June 1960, some Air America crew members like Thomas Sailer were sent to the United States to do low level training and radar avoidance with C-130s, and this program was run by Gar Thorsrud, but that training did not lead to any operation.<sup>76</sup>

The airdrops were resumed on 31 March 1961 under the Kennedy administration, with known missions on 31 March 61 (1 C-130A), 2 April 61 to Mustang in Nepal (2 C-130As), and mid-December 61 to Mustang (2 C-130As),<sup>77</sup> but the airdrop missions probably continued to about mid-1962.<sup>78</sup> At this time, the C-130s “were carrying two navigators, one for the outward portion and one for the return. Radar navigation was used, coming and going. The navigator compared the map and radar details. He also carefully monitored the fuel burn.”<sup>79</sup> In the summer of 1962, Col. Alpheus W. Blizzard replaced Aderholt as commander of Detachment 2. “Blizzard recalls that several flights to Tibet were made after his arrival at Det.2, with the last one coming in 1965.”<sup>80</sup> But this was probably one of the flights to “Oak Tree” in India, as Robert E. Rousselot, Air America’s Director of Flight Operations at Taipei, notes that the Tibetan operation lasted “approximately three years.”<sup>81</sup> The C-130As used on that second Tibetan C-130 airlift still belonged to the 21<sup>st</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron,<sup>82</sup> and the 20 or so C-130As of the 21<sup>st</sup> TCS based at Naha during that period were mostly the same that had operated the Tibetan airlift in 1959/60.<sup>83</sup> For the air crews, two things changed: “First, they took away our 22 cal pistols that were equipped with silencers and we were given 45 cal pistols. These were very ‘ratty’ being put together with different part numbers (for security reasons). The other item was that we were told to forget any of the ‘cover stories’ we had been told and just go ahead and tell them everything: ‘They’ll get it anyway!’ Also from that night on, permission to make an overflight had to have the direct OK from the lips of the president.”<sup>84</sup> At the end, the route to Tibet was changed: “Initially, they flew into Tibet through the back door: over Kunming and western China. Late in 1961, however, the Chinese shifted their air defense system 1000 miles to the west and flights were suspended for at least

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<sup>74</sup> Details of these flights in: Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA’s secret war in Tibet*, pp.117-34.

<sup>75</sup> Leary, *Secret mission to Tibet*, pp.66-71; Trest, *Air Commando One*, pp.87/8 + 91-98. Jim Keck questions the number of 35 to 40 missions given by Leary: “There never were that many unless they were of some other type of missions flown. I was on each monthly operation and it couldn’t have been that many using the C-130s” (Letter dated 12 August 2001 written to the author).

<sup>76</sup> Thomas C. Sailer, interview made with William M. Leary at San Francisco on 8 September 1985; professor Leary’s notes, preserved at UTD/Leary/I B14F6.

<sup>77</sup> Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA’s secret war in Tibet*, pp. 140/1, 158-64.

<sup>78</sup> Fax dated 29 May 2000, kindly sent to the author by Brigadier General Aderholt.

<sup>79</sup> Interview with Leon C. Cartwright, conducted by Prof. William Leary on 5 October 1987, written resume, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F1.

<sup>80</sup> Written resume of an interview with Alpheus W. Blizzard conducted by Prof. Bill Leary at Georgetown, SC, on 27 February 1993 (Interview dated 28-30 August 1990, in: UTD/Leary/I B2F7).

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Robert E. Rousselot, conducted by Prof. William Leary on 10 August 1987, written resume, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F1.

<sup>82</sup> Trest, *Air Commando One*, pp. 87, 92/3.

<sup>83</sup> See the C-130 file of this database.

<sup>84</sup> Letter dated 12 August 2001, kindly written to the author by Jim Keck.

one moon phase. The route then shifted to fly over Burma, but the Burmese began to complain. About the time Khrushchev pounded his shoe on the table at the UN, India gave permission to fly over their territory.”<sup>85</sup>

In late 1961,<sup>86</sup> a small detachment called E-Flight was established within the 21<sup>st</sup> TCS at Naha, Okinawa, and this small flight of C-130As at Naha was dedicated to support the Tibetan airlift,<sup>87</sup> later also becoming responsible for clandestine cargo flights into Laos. The four or five E-Flight ships were not camouflaged, because camouflage might have implied a combat role. The E-Flight ships were identical in internal configuration to the standard A-models except that skate-wheel rollers were installed on the cargo-compartment floor over which cheap wood pallets could be moved. The smaller pallets made handling easier at locations without forklifts and eliminated the need to recover pallets.<sup>88</sup> Detachment 1, 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division had responsibility for the C-130A squadrons at Naha and control of all Combat Cargo Airlift transiting the Ryukyus. The Maintenance and Material support at Naha was the responsibility of the host 51<sup>st</sup> Fighter Interceptor Wing. On 1 January 1962, Detachment 2 of the 315<sup>th</sup> Air Division was organized at Kadena, Okinawa, and assigned a special mission.<sup>89</sup>

Since 1962 the Tibetan program was slowly reorganized as to include the cooperation of India. Already since the early sixties, US President Kennedy followed the idea that evolutionary economic development of Third World countries like India could ensure their noncommunist political stability, and so, India became the world’s largest recipient of US economic aid at that time, i.e. about 650 millions of Dollars per year between 1960 and 1965.<sup>90</sup> When China attacked the North Eastern Frontier Administration area of India on 20 October 62, an air bridge was established between 2 and 11 November 62, bringing small arms from London, Frankfurt and Adana to Calcutta, to be used by the Indian Himalayan infantry. But then, on 21 November 62, maybe frightened by the idea of a major US intervention, China declared a unilateral cease-fire. Nevertheless, between 1963 and 1967, the tensions between India and China continued to be alive, as China constantly threatened the Indian Himalaya border, forcing the country to spend more and more money for weapons.<sup>91</sup> US President Kennedy also offered India to construct a system of radar stations along the Indian northern border, which could survey any Chinese movements.

As to the Tibetans, in November 62 a Southern Air Transport DC-6 piloted by Neese Hicks made three shuttles between Takhli in Thailand and Charbatia airfield in eastern India, bringing in an assortment of military aid for building up a Tibetan resistance force.<sup>92</sup> But things went very slowly in India so that in the fall of 1963, the CIA established Air Ventures Inc. inside Nepal to do the airlift. But then in late 1963 the US and India found a way to cooperate, so that Air Ventures did not have to make covert supply drops.<sup>93</sup> US aircraft would

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<sup>85</sup> Written resume, p.4, of an interview with B.G. Aderholt conducted by Prof. Bill Leary at Fort Walton Beach, FL, on 28-30 August 1990 (Interview dated 28-30 August 1990, in: UTD/Leary/I B12F2).

<sup>86</sup> The official history of the 21<sup>st</sup> TCS, contained in microfilm no. K0716 preserved at the AFHRA at Maxwell AFB, notes a change in the maintenance system in the first six months of 1961: “The section was re-organized from a two flight system, and further divided into four flights. Also included in the reorganization was a night flight under TSGT Stamper.” And there was another change in October 1961: “In October 1961, the section reverted to a basic two-flight system. MSgt Ottmann assumed duties of “A” Flight Chief, and MSgt Napoliello assumed duties as “B” Flight Chief. The Special Projects function, formerly a “D” flight activity, was absorbed by “B” Flight during this change.”

<sup>87</sup> Trest, *Air Commando One*, p.87; fax dated 29 May 2000, kindly sent to the author by Brigadier General Aderholt. Naha airfield is some 20 miles away from Kadena Air Force Base and is equally used for military and civilian flights.

<sup>88</sup> Bowers, *The USAF in South-East Asia*, p.449.

<sup>89</sup> Official history of the 374<sup>th</sup> TCW, contained in microfilm N0497 preserved at Maxwell AFB, p.5.

<sup>90</sup> Paterson / Clifford, *America Ascendant. U.S. foreign relations since 1939*, pp.155/6; Wirsing, *Indien*, p.289.

<sup>91</sup> Wirsing, *Indien*, pp.85-93.

<sup>92</sup> Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA’s secret war in Tibet*, pp. 174 and 284.

<sup>93</sup> Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA’s secret war in Tibet*, pp.196/7.

fly the supplies to India, and Indian aircraft would fly them close to the Tibetan border. The US aircraft to do the job were the DC-6s and later the Boeing 727s of Southern Air Transport. The “Air America Japan” file of this database describes in detail how former Air America DC-6s then operated by Southern Air Transport, working under contract no. AF49(604)-4379 with the USAF’s Logistical Support Group, flew support missions out of Kadena Air Base on Okinawa, which was the main CIA supply station for the Far East during the sixties.<sup>94</sup>

In his diary now preserved at the Air America Archives,<sup>95</sup> Clifford A. Costa describes in detail how those flights to India worked. The DC-6 went to Kadena in December 63 with 2 crews for a covert operation. Team I consisted of Messrs. Sims (Pilot in Command), Marsh, Barrett, La Pointe, Oliver, Keck or Cartwright, and Hudson, and Team II of Messrs. N. Hicks (Pilot in Command), Bussart, Parker, Costa, Scott, Keck or Cartwright, and Hudson. Hudson flew all flights because he was proficient in CW. On Okinawa, Air America operated out of Det.2; Company representatives were Bill Reid (“Mr. Okinawa”) and Bob Aubrey, but Aubrey handled most of the briefings.<sup>96</sup> “This project [was] to fly Tibet tribesmen (insurgents + equipment) to India from Kadena. (A) White portion route: aircraft [N]90781 from Kadena to Bangkok. 100 [miles] out [of] Bangkok, cancel flight plan + proceed to alternate. Alternate was Takhli, Thailand, code name “The Ranch”, “Tic Toc”, “Romeo”, etc. At Takhli, aircraft number change to [N]81907 and aircraft completely sterilized. (B) Black portion route: aircraft [N] 81907 from Takhli to Tavoy, Burma direct across to Charbatia, India (code name “Oak Tree”), also called Cuttack on charts. Our call-sign was “Hightail 1, 2, 3, + 4”, depending on trip flown. Alternates were (1) Bhubaneswar, (2) Kalaikundah. 100 to 200 miles out, down to 500 feet altitude to duck Calcutta radar, also blacked out aircraft. [The] story was: displaced hill tribesmen being sent for vocational training under charter or space available – the company was Marathon Aviation Co, Miami, Florida – to Bhubaneswar. Four trips flown, starting Dec. 26, 1963 → Jan. 2, 1964, total about 100 hours flying time on aircraft [N]90781 [of ] SAT.”<sup>97</sup> The Sims crew flew on 26-27 (“Hightail 1”) and on 30-31 December 63 (“Hightail 3”), and the Sims crew with Costa on 28-29 December 63 (“Hightail 2”) and on 1-2 January 64 (“Hightail 4”). The passengers were Chinese-looking, but nothing is known about the cargo. The missions were timed so that the flight arrived just at dawn. After landing, the passengers were promptly transferred to a waiting C-46, flown by Air America crews, which took off within minutes. Costa recalls a “mad scramble” to unload and transfer people and cargo. Although the crews had been given several contacts in case it was necessary – Dudley Foster at Tainan, “Mr. Long” at Takhli, “Mr. Baker” at Clark AFB, “Clancy” at Danang, “Mr. Leister” at Bangkok, and an Indian Air Force captain called Creywall<sup>98</sup> at “Oak Tree” –, the flights maintained voice radio silence, but reported progress to the Customer on CW.<sup>99</sup> The flights between Kadena and Takhli took about 8 ½ hours westbound and about 6 ½ hours eastbound, and the flights between Takhli and “Oak Tree” a bit less than 5 hours westbound and a little bit more than 4 hours eastbound.

Costa’s next flight to “Oak Tree” was on 15/6 May 1964: “This flight [was] both ‘black’ and white. Questionable cargo from Kad[ena], Okinawa, to India. (A) White portion: [The] aircraft [flown under the] military contract [was N]90782. Flight from Kadena to Bangkok.

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<sup>94</sup> At Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, was the CIA’s main logistics base in East Asia, code-named ZRBLUSH and containing, among other supplies, arms and ammunition (see Leary, *Secret mission to Tibet*, p.69).

<sup>95</sup> As part of the Leary collection; the notes are preserved at UTD/Leary/I B5F17.

<sup>96</sup> Written summary (preserved at UTD/Leary/I B5F17) of a tape recorded interview that William Leary made with Clifford Costa on 5/6 November and 4/5 December 1984; diary of Clifford Costa, p.6, also preserved at UTD/Leary/I B5F17.

<sup>97</sup> Costa, diary, pp.5/6, in: UTD/Leary/I B5F17.

<sup>98</sup> Colonel Laloo Grewal (see Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA’s secret war in Tibet*, pp.188-95).

<sup>99</sup> Written summary (preserved at UTD/Leary/I B5F17) of a tape recorded interview that William Leary made with Clifford Costa on 5/6 November and 4/5 December 1984; diary of Clifford Costa, p.6, also preserved at UTD/Leary/I B5F17.

100 [miles] out [of] Bangkok cancel flight plan and proceed to alternate, which was Takhli, Thailand. At Takhli, Peterson and Conway completely sterilized [the] aircraft removing all markings, tags etc. [The] new number painted on was [N]2782 on tail only (no flag at all). A false FAA certificate of registration was installed in [the] cockpit. It gave: serial # 44917, registration # [N]2782.<sup>100</sup> Address of cover: Marathon Aviation Co., Box 884, Inter Airport Branch, Miami, Florida. (B) Black portion: sterilized are personal gear, and then flew to Tavoy, Burma, then direct to Charbatia, India (Cuttack on charts, code name 'Oak Tree'). Load was ammo, exp[losives], radio gear + 4 passengers. Probably agents? 100 [miles] out, down to 500 feet to get under Calcutta radar. Plane blacked out and radio silence, except for Hudson on CW (coded replies).<sup>101</sup> Mech[anic]s Peterson and Ed Conway went as far as Takhli. [The] white trip [flight] numbers: Kadena-Takhli: 531/14; Takhli-Kadena: 524/15. [...] Crew: Bussart, D.E.; Hicks, N.D.; Hudson, H.J.; Costa, C.A.; Oliver, D.V.; Keck, J.W.; Rockwell, K.R.; Marlow, T.H.; Greiner, T.H. – Time: KAD-TAK: 8+00; TAK-OAK: 4+45; OAK-TAK: 4+27; TAK-KAD: 7+25, [making a total of] 24+37. On return to Takhli, aircraft again changed back to SAT, military contract, [reg. no. N]90782.”<sup>102</sup>

The following month, on 18-20 June 1964, Costa went to “Oak Tree” again: “Aircraft [N]90781. Marsh, H.L.: captain; Walton, J.B.: co-captain; Barrett, R.L.: pilot; Costa, C.A.: flight engineer; Lopshire, L.B.: flight engineer; Sanders, W.L.: navigator; Aubray, R.J.: C.W. operator; Haynes, D.: C.W. operator; Umback, W.: security; Herald, R.J.: load specialist [...] This flight [was] white to Takhli as before. Then sterilize [the] aircraft and change # to [N]2781 with phony registration certificate from our old friends Marathon Aviation of Miami, Florida. Black portion from Takhli to Charbatia, India via Tavoy, Burma. Again down to 450-500 feet 150 miles out, to duck Calcutta radar. Cargo to ‘Oak Tree’ (Charbatia) was 1 jeep and hot cargo, ammo etc., radio gear. Contact at ‘Oak Tree’ is Ed Rector. We had [a] very important passenger out of there, looked Chinese.<sup>103</sup> [...] At any rate, he was V.I.P., had an American escort (CIA). We took them back to Takhli and then direct to Hsin-Chu airfield, Taiwan. Saw the ‘black’ B-26s and P2Vs there; they make the flights over the ‘mainland’. Flight terminate at Kadena. – Time: KAD-TKL: 8+00; TKL-OAK: 4+35; OAK-TKL: 4+47; TKL-Hsin-Chu: 5+56; Hsin-Chu-KAD: 1+45, [making a total of] 25+03.”<sup>104</sup> By then, cargo flights from Kadena to “Oak Tree” followed the same pattern. On 19/20 September 64, Clifford Costa was on another mission to India, this time aboard N90782 piloted by D.E. Bussart and A.R. Gibson: “This flight same as previous black flights. Flight was white to Takhli, Thailand. Then complete sterilization of crew and aircraft and a ‘black’ flight to India (Oak Tree) and back. Aircraft # change to [N]2782, and our old cover company – Marathon Aviation of Miami, Florida – was used with fake FAA credentials. Again used low altitude 4-500 feet ‘in’, in order to get below Calcutta radar. Cargo was guns, radio gear, ammo, explosives and other supplies to the ‘boys’ up on the border. Contact man at Oak Tree is Ed Rector.”<sup>105</sup>

The security was especially tight when the DC-6s brought back Tibetan guerrillas who had

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<sup>100</sup> Costa, diary, p.10, in: UTD/Leary/ I B5F17. While the registration N2782 was false, serial # 44917 was the correct c/n of that particular aircraft, that is of DC-6 N90782.

<sup>101</sup> The aircraft arrived on the coast at dawn and followed a river to the isolated airfield. The pilots were Bussart and N. Hicks (Summary of the interview with Clifford Costa recorded by William Leary, in: UTD/Leary/I B5F17).

<sup>102</sup> Costa, diary, pp.10-12, in: UTD/Leary/ I B5F17.

<sup>103</sup> Costa speculated that the passenger might have been “a Chinese communist engineer from Tibet who defected” (Diary, p.17, in: UTD/Leary/ I B5F17). According to Conboy / Morrison (*The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, p.290, note 27), a senior Chinese official had secretly defected to Kathmandu, Nepal, and had been flown to Charbatia by Air Ventures helicopter pilot Jerome McEntee. On the pretext of servicing two ARC C-46 transports, a CIA-operated DC-6 arrived at Oak Tree, took aboard the ex-communist while the plane was taxiing at the end of the runway and flew him from India to Taiwan.

<sup>104</sup> Costa, diary, pp.16-18, in: UTD/Leary/ I B5F17.

<sup>105</sup> Costa, Diary, pp.20/1, in: UTD/Leary/ I B5F17.

been trained outside India. Cliff Costa was on two of such flights. On 24/25 September 64, the aircraft was N90782 piloted by H.L. Marsh and H.J. Hudson. "Same type trip as previous. Black portion from Takhli with crew and aircraft black, with the old Marathon Aviation cover story. This time [we] carried cargo and 30-35 of the rebels (guerrillas). Security is tight with these passengers on board. [We] brought up Dudley Foster (CAT security) from Tainan plus customer liaison man – unknown. These boys look to me like Tibetans or from Nepal. Anyway, they are tough little guys. Believe they go up to the Tibet / India / Burma-China border to stir up trouble. On these passenger flights we are always met at Charbatia at [the] far end of the runway by a 'black' C-46, and they are 'off' on [the] last leg of their long journey in a matter of minutes. Aircraft # and paper changed to [N]2782 (Marathon Aviation Co, Florida)."<sup>106</sup> On the last flight to "Oak Tree" mentioned in his diary, that of 27/28 October 64, Cliff Costa was aboard DC-6 N90782, piloted by N.D. Hicks and A.R. Gibson: "This was a 'white' SAT flight as far as Takhli. Then crew and aircraft [were] sterilized and left Takhli as Marathon Aviation aircraft [N]2782 with phony FAA documents and no flag. [The] flight to India (Charbatia) was ok – [the] route is now changed. We used to cross directly over Burma (Tavoy), but as of late, have been going south out of Takhli over [the] Gulf of Siam, till we hit past Burma, then cross over and take up a direct route to Charbatia, India. Still going down to low level 150 miles out, to duck radar. This trip we had 50 more 'insurgents' on board. They all look same – still believe they are Tibetans or Nepalese. Also supplies. Ed Rector still at 'Oak Tree' as 'contact', Dick Long at Kadena and Takhli is still a mystery: Company or Customer? They have tightened up security a lot. Don't want us back aft around our passengers any more than necessary. They (the passengers) are really kept in the dark. They never know where they have come from. Keep their trucks covered and aircraft curtains pulled; so they never know where we land, who we are, etc. etc. Same old C-46 pick-up as soon as we landed at 'Oak Tree'."<sup>107</sup>

But there were more Air America crews working for Southern Air Transport who, from time to time, flew DC-6 missions from Kadena, Okinawa, to "Oak Tree" on the East coast of India. Captain Jesse Walton made 3 flights to "Oak Tree": no.1 on 18/9 June 64, as described above, no.2 on 25/6 August 64, and no.3 on 3/4 February 1965; each time, the flight was at night, and each time, the aircraft descended to 500 feet above the water to avoid radar detection.<sup>108</sup> Air America Captain Joe Hazen, also working for Southern Air Transport at that time, recalls similar flying conditions, when he flew his DC-6 to "Oak Tree" on 20 March 67 and on 27 April 67.<sup>109</sup> Others were probably to follow, as in May 68, Air America DC-6 N90782 was still assigned to contract no. AF49(604)-4379 with the USAF's Logistical Support Group for use by SAT out of Kadena.<sup>110</sup> On 15-17 May 65, a SAT DC-6 piloted by Eddie Sims even delivered ammunition, weapons, and a small number of radios and inflatable

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<sup>106</sup> Costa, Diary, pp.22/3, in: UTD/Leary/ I B5F17.

<sup>107</sup> Costa, Diary, pp.25-27, in: UTD/Leary/ I B5F17.

<sup>108</sup> E-mails dated 30 June 2002 and 20 July 2002, kindly sent to the author by Jesse Walton.

<sup>109</sup> E-mail dated 9 August 2004, kindly sent to the author by Joe Hazen.

<sup>110</sup> "Status of aircraft" of 1 May 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2.



Southern Air Transport DC-6A N90781 at Taipei in February 61  
(with kind permission from Mel Lawrence / Airliners.net)

rubber boats all the way from Okinawa to a drop zone a few kilometres from Tangya inside Nepal, making refuelling stops at Takhli and “Oak Tree”.<sup>111</sup> In 1966/67, John E. Lee also made three or four trips to India, “arriving at ‘Oak Tree’ on the coast of India just before daylight. Zeke Zelitis, whom he knew at NACC, would meet [the] airplane and arrange for offloading (mainly arms; a Helio on one occasion). The crew would have a good meal, shower, and go to bed, then return that night.”<sup>112</sup> In 1966, the CIA even scheduled four Boeing 727 flights between Okinawa and “Oak Tree”, to be made at low level to avoid radar and anti-American opposition at New Delhi – evidently using the aircraft of Air America / SAT.<sup>113</sup> Later, the 727s were even tested at Takhli for air drops with conveyer belt and rollers, because the aircraft could be pressurized until the drop, but although the system worked well, it was never used in operation.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, pp.216-18.

<sup>112</sup> John E. Lee, interview conducted by William M. Leary at Watkinsville, GA on 27 May 1987; Prof. Leary's paper is preserved at UTD/Leary/I B8F9.

<sup>113</sup> Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, p.210; for the aircraft see the file “The jets” of this database.

<sup>114</sup> Thomas C. Sailer, interview made with William M. Leary at San Francisco on 8 September 1985; professor Leary's notes, preserved at UTD/Leary/ I B14F6.



Southern Air Transport Boeing 727 N5092 at Nha Trang in 1968  
(UTD/Misc.Mat./B4F4)

“Oak Tree” was the code-name of Charbatia Air Base, located north of the city of Bhubaneswar in the east of India, home of the *Aviation Research Center* (ARC), an intelligence joint venture between the CIA and the Indian Intelligence Bureau, created on 7 September 63.<sup>115</sup> Already earlier that year, crews of Intermountain Aviation of Marana, AZ had come into contact with the Indians. Former CAT, Air America, and Intermountain pilot Connie Seigrist recalls: “22 March 1963: Gar [= Garfield Thorsrud of Intermountain] and I flew a C-46 N9700Z on a local flight at Washington National airport in Washington, DC. Before take-off we were introduced to some Indian Nationals from India. They were there for the purpose to have an introductory flight in a C-46 type aircraft. There were six or eight of them dressed in civilian clothes introduced to me as representing the Air Force, CAA, and Commercial Interests from India. During the flight I let those that wanted to fly around a bit to get the feel of the controls to do so. One did most of the flying and I let him make the landing. I assisted him as necessary but he still did a respectable job for anyone the first time at the controls of a C-46. I would find much later his position was a Commander from a special unit in the Indian Air Force. His name: Commander Grewal. A few days before this flight, Gar had briefed me of the possibility of such a flight. The Agency was interested in forming an associated airborne type project in India with the Indians. The Agency proposed to quickly get the operation off the ground and into the air would be to acquire the C-46 model D readily available from USAF storage depots. When that opportunity began to materialize, the Agency gave Southern Air Transport of Miami, Florida a contract to perform a major overhaul on some C-46D’s to be flown to India for the project. Later Intermountain received part of the contract to do maintenance and flight test on some of the C-46D’s. Southern Air Transport also received the contract to deliver all of the C-46D’s to India. Air America Inc. from Tachikawa, Japan became the first proprietary involved in having received the first part of the overall contract, flying three<sup>116</sup> of its C-46’s to Agra, India. Air America made available its American national pilots on the C-46’s. Air America also assigned one of their Helio Courier aircraft from Vientiane, Laos with its American pilot instructor for the

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<sup>115</sup> Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA’s secret war in Tibet*, pp.190/1. In May 1964, a CIA U-2 took off from Charbatia Air Base, performed a spy mission over Xinjiang Province of Red China, and rolled off the end of the runway after it had touched down again at Charbatia; hastily manhandled into a hanger, it was later repaired, and then discreetly flown out without attempting further overflights from Indian territory (Conboy / Kohli, *Spies in the Himalayas*, pp. 23/4).

<sup>116</sup> Only 2 Air America C-46s remained with the project: B-846 became VT-DRH, and B-854 became VT-DRI (see the C-46 file of this database).

project.<sup>117</sup> Air Asia Co Ltd, an Agency maintenance proprietary from Tainan, Taiwan and Intermountain Aviation shared the maintenance responsibilities in India for the project. The Indians would receive ground school and line maintenance training until they were capable of managing their own maintenance. The India air operation was code named 'Oak Tree'".<sup>118</sup>

Since September 63, that unit trained agents for infiltration into Tibet,<sup>119</sup> parachuted them to launch sites close to the border of Tibet, re-supplied those agents as well as paramilitary outposts, dropped supplies to the Tibetan guerrillas of Mustang, made reconnaissance flights close to the Chinese border,<sup>120</sup> installed sensors on high mountain tops close to the border,<sup>121</sup> later installed wiretaps, and did other covert operations, using among other aircraft up to 4 Helio Couriers, up to 7 Helio Twin Couriers, and probably up to 22 C-46s. Former Air America and Intermountain pilot Connie Seigris gives some details about testing the C-46s destined for the project: "22 November 1963: I test flew N10703. It was a C-46D and our first aircraft of the Indian contract. Four other aircraft I personally flight tested were numbered N10708, N10710, N10705, and N10706."<sup>122</sup> All of those aircraft are described in detail in the C-46, Helio, and Twin Helio files of this database. Officially, even as late as 1969, at least the C-46s – which were later based at Delhi and did not bear any markings apart from the registration – were understood to have been used in relief work, especially in the Kashmir region,<sup>123</sup> and so the flow of aircraft that joined the ARC was never affected by the total arms embargo and the termination of US military aid that President Johnson inflicted on India and Pakistan after both nations started a war in August 65. As starvation due to a constant shortage of food was a big problem in India during the early sixties, during this time, i.e. until 1967, many millions of tons of wheat per year were shipped from the United States to India.<sup>124</sup>

As to the aircraft of ARC, one of their C-46s was converted by CIA technicians into an electronic intelligence (ELINT) platform in 1964; this aircraft flew regularly along the Himalayas recording Chinese telecommunication signals from inside Tibet. Sometimes, the ARC C-46s had problems with the altitude of some airports. Connie Seigris recalls: "February 1964: The Indians had an airfield in the Himalayas located at about 12,000 foot elevation they wanted to service with the C-46D. They requested performance charts from sea level up to 12,000 feet. To the best of our research we were unable to locate performance charts for the D model C-46. [...] As a result of the Indian request the Agency awarded Intermountain a contract to conduct high altitude take-off performance tests and construct charts for the aircraft. [...] February 1964: N10705 was made available by the Agency for Intermountain to fly the altitude tests which would enable us to construct the performance charts. Intermountain maintenance installed a 1000 gallon fuel tank aboard N10705. The tank had a visual sight gage so that we could monitor filling the tank accurately with water to any desired level to be able to control our aircraft gross weight for take-off at different altitudes. [...] The three airfield chosen as stepping stones in elevation were Albuquerque, NM 5,350 ft., Bogota, Columbia 8,000 ft, and La Paz, Bolivia 13,300 ft."<sup>125</sup> The tests took place between 28 February and 30 March 64. Perhaps as a result of these tests, some of the remaining 9 ARC C-46s received rocket boosters in 1964 that were installed on the bottom of

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<sup>117</sup> Helio B-847 became VT-DRJ; the second Helio, VT-DRK, had formerly been a VIAT aircraft: XV-NAI.

<sup>118</sup> Connie Seigris, *Memoirs*, p.67, in: UTD/Leary/I B9F16.

<sup>119</sup> Head of that Tibetan force was General Sujana Singh Uban, who, in the hill village of Chakrata, turned Tibetan refugees into warriors. ARC had been conceived as a covert air wing to infiltrate General Uban's commandos into Tibet in the event of renewed hostilities with China (Conboy / Kohli, *Spies in the Himalayas*, pp.16+54).

<sup>120</sup> Several missions are described in Conboy / Kohli, *Spies in the Himalayas*, pp.54-56 and 92/3.

<sup>121</sup> These missions are described in detail in Conboy / Kohli, *Spies in the Himalayas*.

<sup>122</sup> Connie Seigris, *Memoirs*, p.67, in: UTD/Leary/I B9F16.

<sup>123</sup> Letter dated 29 April 2001, kindly sent to the author by Peter G. Hillman, Air-Britain's specialist for India.

<sup>124</sup> Wirsing, *Indien*, pp.287-93.

<sup>125</sup> Connie Seigris, *Memoirs*, pp.67/8, in: UTD/Leary/I B9F16.

the fuselages to allow the aircraft to take off from some of India's highest airfields with heavy loads.<sup>126</sup> As many Third World countries feared CIA infiltration even thru humanitarian organizations like the Peace Corps,<sup>127</sup> Air America kept a very low profile in India, and many aircraft delivered to the ARC by the CIA passed thru the hands of the lesser-known Miami-based Marathon Aviation, which had close relations with Southern Air Transport,<sup>128</sup> another CIA-property since October 1960. Marathon Aviation was not only the cover used by SAT DC-6s for their flights to "Oak Tree", it is also known to have furnished at least 3 Helio Couriers plus Helio 500 Twin Courier VT-DVL, while Twin Courier VT-DVM, acquired in December 67, was the former N10034 of Air Ventures Inc.,<sup>129</sup> the CIA-property previously operating in Nepal.

As to Air America, the Company not only supported the ARC by supplying the first 2 C-46s (VT-DRH and VT-DRI) and the first 2 Helio Couriers (VT-DRJ and VT-DRK, of which VT-DRJ had belonged to Air America) in September 1963, but they also sent some of their best pilots to act as instructors for the ARC crews. Head of the C-46 conversion team was Bill Welk, and the Helio Courier and later the Helio Twin Courier conversion team was headed by Jim Rhyne, who also flew some reconnaissance missions in the Himalayas in 1965, using one of ARC's Twin Couriers.<sup>130</sup> Other instructors included M.D. Johnson, Al Judkins, and Maurice Clough, with Connie Seigris and Tom Sailer providing additional C-46 training at Charbatia in early 1964.<sup>131</sup> In the 1964 period, Connie Seigris even flew Indian Air Force aircraft, when requested by the CIA to do so. The C-46s also dropped agents into Red China, and the Helios and Twin Helios also flew reconnaissance and penetration missions into Red China.<sup>132</sup>

In his memoirs, Connie Seigris recalls his time in India as follows: "The last week of May [1964] I proceeded to New Delhi per Gar's instructions and reported to Ed [= Col. Ed Rector]. Ed introduced me to Commander Grewal, the Indian Commander for the project. Ed and Commander Grewal informed me my first assignment would be at an airfield outside the city of Agra. I would be required to participate in an airdrop exercise that was scheduled. Also I might be required to fly an aircraft in the exercise. I reported to the airfield as required. I was introduced to some Americans I already knew and met some Indian Air Force Officers who informed me they would like me to fly a C-46 in a two ship night drop pattern late that evening over the Yamuna river bed nearby. The other C-46 would be flown by one of the Indian pilots in the program. Our drop would consist of Tibetan refugees who were in paramilitary parachute training. I noticed the parked C-46s we would fly were Air America aircraft. The Air Force weather forecast for the first night was a strong wind and the exercise was canceled until the following night. [...] The next day the weather [...] was forecasted to be fine that night for our airdrop exercise. [...] I taxied out behind the other aircraft to the runway. He took off and I waited the prescribed time for my take-off. After take-off I turned left, climbed to 1,200 feet, and was already established in the pattern as I could see the lighted drop zone on the sand and the river in the moonlight, although for some unknown reason the other aircraft's navigation lights were not in sight. The lights had been on for take-off. I called on the radio to ask where he was so that I could space myself properly in case he had in some way gotten close in behind me. There was no answer to my radio call and I became concerned he might be in trouble. By this time I am approaching the lighted DZ when suddenly his navigation lights came on and he was directly in front of me slightly higher coming directly at

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<sup>126</sup> Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, pp.171-207, especially pp. 190-95, 200/1, and 206-8.

<sup>127</sup> Paterson / Clifford, *America Ascendant. U.S. foreign relations since 1939*, p.156.

<sup>128</sup> See the "Valid Contract List" dated 7 July 1964, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1.

<sup>129</sup> *Ib.* and FAA, US Civil Aircraft Register of 1 July 1966, p.135.

<sup>130</sup> Conboy / Kohli, *Spies in the Himalayas*, pp.54-56

<sup>131</sup> Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, pp.191/2, 255, 286.

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Connie Seigris, dated 1 June 2006.

me. If I had tried to turn out of his way following air navigation rules he would surely have flown into my wing. I had no choice but push on the stick and go under him with hopes he did not fly into the top of my tail. We missed by a hair. I turned quickly to the left hoping to miss any jumpers in case he had made his first drop. Luckily he had not made the drop. I continued my turn to get behind him and keep him in sight at all times determined, if he wanted to kill himself, he was not going to take me with him. After some time he finally made a left hand 180 turn over the river and went straight back to the DZ with me following behind him.

I gave the jump master the light signal to prepare for the first jump. He came forward and said he was ready. Over the DZ I rang the jump bell. There was a pause for some reason, then immediately there was noise and yelling in the cabin. The jump master ran to the cockpit and said two of his jumpers were entangled and one was hanging by his leg out in the slip stream. I already realized by then we were in an emergency predicament as I was now having my hands full just trying to control my aircraft. The jump master went back to the jump door, but soon came to the cockpit again and said one jumper had parachuted free, but the other one was still hanging by his leg to a static line out in the slip stream. Also the jumper was too heavy for them to pull in. Suddenly the aircraft was controlling normal again. By now the excitement was on the level that English was forgotten and Hindu reigned supreme with me totally cut-off from any communication of what was going on in the aircraft. Finally when the jump master realized I was not getting the word, he informed me in English the rest of the jump was cancelled, some of his jumpers were injured, and we would go back to land. We landed, taxied back, and parked without further mishap. After one hell-of-a-sigh of relief on my part I departed the aircraft ready to celebrate for having come out alive of such a conglomeration of events. [...]

My opening initiation into the Indian operation was an eye opener to say the least, which left me elated the next morning when I was informed I was scheduled to return to New Delhi and catch a flight to Charbatia for continuing duties. [...] I flew the same C-46 back to New Delhi. It was decided to use it as the air transport commuter for the project until cable mountings were available to restore it for parachute jumping. The Indians liked the Air America C-46's much more than the C-46D's we were making available for them. I assumed the reason they liked the AAM C-46's better was from their polished aluminum commercial appearance compared to the militant blue-white paint look of the D models. Arriving in Charbatia I observed construction of major proportions in progress such as new hangars, runway improvement with extension of length, billets, admin buildings, transit quarters, etc., and close by permanent type construction of family housing. [...] From this point on my stay and activity in India was mundane in the nature of aviation. I participated in flying, training, classroom instruction, and joined in casual social functions with the Indians. I commuted to New Delhi when called in by Ed. Ed would also come to Charbatia to stay abreast of the activities and see how I was fitting into the scene. [...] I left the first week of July [1964] and returned to Marana."<sup>133</sup>

In 1966, other ARC air bases like Doomdommah or Sarsawa were added for special operations. But in the summer of 1967 the CIA reduced its links to the ARC, and the Indians decided to introduce Antonov An-12s to the ARC fleet and to increase the number of Mil Mi-4 helicopters already introduced earlier. In 1969 cooperation between the CIA and the ARC still existed, but it had come down to nothing, when the war between India and Pakistan began in 1971.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Connie Seigrist, *Memoirs*, pp.69-72, in: UTD/Leary/I B9F16.

<sup>134</sup> Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA's secret war in Tibet*, pp.225-42.