

AIR AMERICA: PIPER PA-23 APACHES

by Dr. Joe F. Leeker

Last updated on 1 June 2009

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

In Laos, the main task of Air America's Apaches seems to have been communications flights and to transport small goods to outlying villages. Later in South Vietnam and at Bangkok, the Apaches were used for the same type of missions, mostly under USAID-contracts. But although USAID was officially the main contractor to Air America in South Vietnam, all CIA missions in South Vietnam were flown as part of the USAID contracts, and within those contracts, all CIA requirements were handled with priority (Harnage, *A thousand faces*, pp. 81/2). Former Air America pilot George Taylor recalls his flights in Air America's Apache in South Vietnam: "The majority of flights out of Saigon was either for the Embassy or USAID (United States Aid for International Development) and was used mostly to fly passengers and light cargo (mostly medical supplies) around the country. I did on occasion fly Mr. William Colby, who at that time was CIA Station Chief, to some of the strips in Vietnam and on the Vietnam / Laos border and at times some of his people." (e-mail dated 8 May 2005, kindly sent to the author by George Taylor). And "the military in the Embassy would often get to use it when needed" (e-mail dated 22 May 2005, kindly sent to the author by George Taylor). One of Air America's Apaches was used out of Phnom Penh until January 64: "The Apache in Cambodia [...] was used mostly by USAID, to take people around the country; mostly the people were in suits and really looked like they were just seeing the sights." (e-mail dated 29 May 2005, kindly sent to the author by George Taylor). But in the early sixties, the CIA supported a paramilitary group called "Khmer Serei" or "Free Khmer" in Cambodia (Sutsakhan, *The Khmer Republic at war*, p. 6), and possibly Air America's Apache was also used for contacts with them.

Statistics according to official Air America documents:

1962: 2 (Minutes ExCom-AAAL of 23 January 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1)

1963: 1 Apache was operated in Laos, the other one in Cambodia in 63; both were to be replaced by Aztec Bs in 1963 (Minutes ExCom-AAM of 12 February 63, in: UTD/CIA/B3F4); one operated out of Phnom Penh, one out of Saigon in late 63; both will be released in January 64 and should be put up for sale (Minutes ExCom-AAAL/AAM of 10 December 63, in: UTD/CIA/B7F2)

1966: Inventory of 1 Feb. 66, in: UTD/Herd/B2: 2

1972: Inventories of 31 March 72 > 30 November 72 (in: UTD/CIA/B1F10): 2 on both dates

The individual aircraft histories:

Type registration / serial c/n (msn) date acquired origin



PA-23 Apache N3183P
at Vientiane on 27 April 60
(UTD/Kirkpatrick, slide A 5239)



PA-23 Geronimo N3183P
at Bangkok in the mid-sixties
(UTD/Hickler/B28)



PA-23 Geronimo N3183P at Saigon in the late sixties
(with kind permission from Ward S. Reimer)

PA-23 Apache N3183P 23-1411 (25 June 58) bought fr. Piper Aircraft
Inc for CAT Inc.

Service history: bought by CAT Inc. on 25 June 58; registered to them on 3 July 58 (Status as of 5 April 74, in: UTD/CIA/B56F4); at Vientiane on 27 April 60 (UTD/Kirkpatrick, slide A 5239); a photo taken at Udorn in August 62 is in UTD/Abadie/B2F8; operated out of Phnom Penh in 1963; transferred from Phnom Penh to Saigon on 7 January 64, where it remained unassigned in February 64 (AAM aircraft availability of 1 February 64, in the possession of Ward Reimer who kindly faxed it to the author on 17 February 2004); still based unassigned at Saigon in April 64 (Aircraft availability as of 1 April 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B8F4); assigned to contract AID-430-675 for use out of Saigon, called thru 31 October 64 (Aircraft status as of 7 July 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/ B1F1); reregistered to Air America on 29 January 65 (Status as of 12 August 74, in: UTD/CIA/B56F4); converted to "Geronimo" in 65 (Minutes ExCom-AAAC/AAM of 20 Nov. 64, in: UTD/CIA/B7F3); on 21 May 65, N3183P

nearly hit a military aircraft at Hoai An (V-206), South Vietnam (Aircraft accidents 1965, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2); overshot the runway upon landing at an unknown place in South Vietnam on 15 July 65 (Aircraft accidents 1965, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2); repaired; assigned to contract AID-430-1092 for use out of Saigon in November 65 (Aircraft status as of 1 Nov. 65, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); assigned to contract AID-430-1092 for use out of Saigon in April and May 66 (Aircraft status as of 8 April 66, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1; Aircraft status as of 4 May 66, in: UTD/Hickler/B1F2); on 17 December 66, the bottom of the nose section of N3183P was torn due to mechanical failure, causing both engines to stop and the propellers to be bent; repaired (XOXO of 17 Dec. 66, in: UTD/Hickler/B26F16); on 17 August 67, the left landing gear of N3183P was damaged after landing at Qui Nhon (V-13); repaired (XOXO of 17 Aug. 67, in: UTD/Hickler/B27F1); in use out of Saigon at least between 1 June 66 and 15 September 67; used as a spare aircraft at Bangkok since 8 November 67, still in May 68 (Aircraft status as of 1 May 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2); based at Bangkok as a spare aircraft 15-30 June 69 (F.O.C. of 15 June 69, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7B) and 16-31 August 69 (F.O.C. of 15 Aug. 69, in: UTD/Hickler/B1F1); photos are preserved in: UTD/Hickler/B28 + B32, probably taken at Bangkok; inactivated at Bangkok on 23 September 69, 14 days to reactivate in April 73 (F.O.C. of 16 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14); no longer current after September 69; the offer for sale was approved on 13 May 69 (Minutes ExCom-AAAC/AAM of 13 May 69, in: UTD/CIA/B8F3); considered as surplus and offered for sale in 71 (Memorandum of 29 Sept. 71, p. 4, in: UTD/CIA/B19F8).



Former Air America PA-23 Geronimo N3183P being overhauled at Udorn in 1974
after it had been sold to Bo Larsson
(with kind permission from Ward S. Reimer)

Fate: sold to Bo H. Larsson, Vasteras, Sweden, on 18 January 74 for \$ 11,500 (Letter by Clyde S. Carter dated 30 Jan. 74, in: UTD/CIA/B17F3; Status as of 5 April 74, in: UTD/CIA/B56F4; e-mail dated 16 January 2006, kindly sent to the author by Ward S. Reimer); sold to Technical Industries, Fort Lauderdale, FL, in 1976; current in 1977; sold to Kenosha Aero, Kenosha, WI, in October 82; sold to the Apostolic Advancement Association, Emelle, AL, on 23 February 1999; current with them in March 2004 (request submitted to the FAA on 13 March 2004 at <http://162.58.35.241/acdatabase/>).



Apache N3277P at Saigon on 8 July 63
(UTD/Kirkpatrick, slide A 5410)



N3277P accident at Saigon on 15 Oct.64
(with kind permission from Ward S. Reimer)

PA-23 Apache N3277P

23-1222

25 April 61

bought from Medico Inc, New York/Vientiane (at Vientiane on 27 April 60; see UTD/Kirkpatrick, slide A 5239); this was also known as the estate of the Dr. Thomas Dooley Foundation (e-mail dated 2 May 2005, kindly sent by the author by George Taylor)

Service history: registered to Air America on 21 June 61 (Letter by Clyde S. Carter dated 6 Sept. 73, in: UTD/CIA/B15F5; Status as of 5 April 74, in: UTD/CIA/B56F4); based at Saigon; in use there at least between 8 July 63 and 2 August 66; seen at Saigon on 8 July 63 (UTD/Kirkpatrick, slide A 5410); assigned to contract DA92-321-PBC-1861 for CSG flying services out of Saigon in February 64 and then until 31 March 64, when it was released from that contract; still based unassigned at Saigon in April 64 (AAM aircraft availability of 1 February 64, in the possession of Ward Reimer who kindly faxed it to the author on 17 February 2004; Aircraft availability as of 1 April 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B8F4); still unassigned in July 64, with frequent calls for contract DA92-321-PBC-1861 out of Saigon (Aircraft status as of 7 July 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); the landing gear failed at Saigon on 15 October 64 (Aircraft accidents 1964, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2); repaired; was to be converted to "Geronimo" in 65 (Minutes ExCom-AAAC/AAM of 20 Nov. 64, in: UTD/CIA/B7F3), but was never converted; one of the propellers was damaged at Bac Lieu, South Vietnam, on 22 January 65 (Aircraft accidents 1965, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2); repaired; on 6 May 65, the pilot of N3277P overshot at Go Cong (V-203), South Vietnam (Aircraft accidents 1965, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2); repaired; assigned to contract AF49(604)-4242 for use out of Saigon in November 65 (Aircraft status as of 1 Nov. 65, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); assigned to contract AF49(604)-4395 for use out of Saigon in April and May 66 (Aircraft status as of 8 April 66, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1; Aircraft status as of 4 May 66, in: UTD/Hickler/B1F2); used as a spare aircraft at Tainan in May 68, to be re-assigned (Aircraft status as of 1 May 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2); inactivated at Tainan on 5 April 68, 14 days to reactivate in April 73 (F.O.C. of 16 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14); no longer current after April 68;

the offer for sale was approved on 13 May 69 (Minutes ExCom-AAAC/AAM of 13 May 69, in: UTD/CIA/B8F3); considered as surplus and offered for sale in September 71 (Memorandum of 29 September 71, p. 4, in: UTD/CIA/B19F8).

Fate: sold to Norman W. Karschner and Omar F. Sherwood, c/o USAID Saigon, on 3 September 73 (Letter by Clyde S. Carter dated 30 January 74, in: UTD/CIA/B17F3; Status as of 5 April 74, in: UTD/CIA/B56F4; Summary of aircraft sales, in: UTD/CIA/B40F6); the FAA files for this aircraft say that the new owners belonged to the USDAO of Saigon, which is probably more correct; sold to Herbert T. Stephens, DAO Saigon, on 8 February 75; sold to Sky of Siam, Udon Thani, as HS-CHG on 23 June 1975; registered to them on 2 July 75; noted at Don Muang in January 82; sold to Australia, and the wings were used to repair VH-DBF (c/n 23-1961), which had been damaged in March 83; the fuselage was noted at Camden, NSW, in July 88 (The subsequent history of this aircraft was kindly indicated to the author by Steve Darke in his e-mails dated 31 August 2003 and 4 September 2003).

© University of Texas at Dallas, 11 August 2008, last updated on 1 June 2009.