

## AIR AMERICA: SIKORSKY H-19A (S-55)

by Dr. Joe F. Leeker

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### The types of missions flown by Air America's H-19As:

The main type of mission of Air America's H-19As seems to have been to fly around CIA officers to meetings in outlying areas, to distribute leaflets during elections (Leary, *CIA Operations in Laos*, p. 55), but also to establish a Hmong irregular army. In November 60, Air America H-19As also supported the pro-Western troops of Phoumi Nosavan against Kong Le (Conboy / Morrison, *Shadow war*, p. 37). Although official Air America papers quote the serials of the H-19As as "H-1" and so on, only the numbers were painted on the aircraft, without the letter "H-".

### Statistics according to official Air America documents:

Sikorsky H-19A (= S-55): 4 leased from the USAF; still in use on 19 July 60 (Minutes BoD-AAM 19 July 60, in: UTD/CIA/B3F1)

### The individual aircraft histories:

Type	registration / serial	c/n (msn)	date acquired	origin
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H-19A H-1 north of Vientiane on 3 June 60  
(UTD/Kirkpatrick, slide A 5228)

Sikorsky H-19A	H-1	55.127	16 March 60	leased from USAF 51-3871
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**Service history:** received at Seno (L-46), Laos, on 16 March 60 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept. 1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); the first four Air America H-19 pilots arrived in March 60; used to carry CIA officers to meetings in outlying areas and to distribute leaflets during elections (Leary, *CIA Operations in Laos*, p. 55); based at Vientiane, later Bangkok and Pakse, then Vientiane again (before March 61) (UTD/Leary/B1 for 1960); at Vientiane on 27 April 60, without titles (UTD/Kirkpatrick, slide A 5241); made a forced landing north of Vientiane on 3 June 60 (UTD/Kirkpatrick, slides A 5253 and 5254); other slides taken north of Vientiane on 3 June 60 are Kirkpatrick A5227, A5228, A5229, and A5230; at Vientiane on 8 June 60, without titles; serial painted as "1"; repaired (UTD/Kirkpatrick, slide A 5215); had

a mid-air collision with Air America H-19A H-8 at Pakse (L-11), Laos, on 13 October 60 (Aircraft accidents 1960, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2); repaired; the rotor blade tip was damaged at Pakse (L-11), Laos, on 15 November 60, when the landing gear strut suffered structural failure while taxiing (Aircraft accidents 1960, in: UTD/CIA/B49 F2); a photo of the damaged blade is in UTD/Abadie/B2; repaired.

**Fate:** delivered to USOM/Thailand on 10 March 61 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept. 1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); no longer in use in May 62 (Minutes ExCom AACL of 8 May 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1); probably given by USOM/Thailand to the Royal Thai Border Patrol Police, Bangkok, as ?, and again involved in an Air America training program for the Thai Police (contract USAID-493-11) in May 62 (Jerry Fink, "Air America and the Thai Police", in: *Air America Log*, vol. VII, no. 4, 1973, pp. 4-5). Converted to SH-19A, reportedly to MAP at Tachikawa, Japan, on 22 February 62, later possibly to the South Vietnamese Air Force (e-mail dated 23 Sept. 2003, kindly sent by Johan van der Wai to the author).

Sikorsky H-19A	H-9	55.076	16 March 60	leased from USAF 51-3849
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**Service history:** received at Seno (L-46), Laos, on 16 March 60 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept. 1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); the first four Air America H-19 pilots arrived in March 60; used to carry CIA officers to meetings in outlying areas and to distribute leaflets during elections (Leary, *CIA Operations in Laos*, p. 55); based at Vientiane, later Bangkok and Pakse, then Vientiane again (before March 61) (UTD/Leary/B1 for 1960).

**Fate:** delivered to USOM/Thailand on 10 March 61 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept. 1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); no longer in use in May 62 (Minutes ExCom AACL of 8 May 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1); probably given by USOM/Thailand to the Royal Thai Border Patrol Police, Bangkok, as ?, and again involved in an Air America training program for the Thai Police (contract USAID-493-11) in May 62 (Jerry Fink, "Air America and the Thai Police", in: *Air America Log*, vol. VII, no.4, 1973, pp. 4-5). Converted to SH-19A, reportedly to MAP at Tachikawa, Japan, on 22 February 62, later possibly to the South Vietnamese Air Force (e-mail dated 23 Sept. 2003, kindly sent by Johan van der Wai to the author).



H-19A H-3 at the crash site at Na Nhom, Laos on 26 May 60  
(UTD/Kirkpatrick/B30)

Sikorsky H-19A

H-3

55.091

7 April 60

leased from USAF  
51-3853

**Service history:** received at Seno (L-46), Laos, on 7 April 60 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept. 1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); the first four Air America H-19 pilots arrived in March 60; used to carry CIA officers to meetings in outlying areas and to distribute leaflets during elections (Leary, *CIA Operations in Laos*, p. 55); based at Vientiane, later Bangkok and Pakse, then Vientiane again (before March 61) (UTD/Leary/B1 for 1960).

**Fate:** lost at Na Nhom, Laos, on 26 May 60, when it came down in the jungle due to a power plant malfunction, but could not be recovered due to guerilla activities; a photo of the crash site is preserved in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B30; so it was abandoned on the customer's advice (Minutes BoD-AAM 19 July 60, in: UTD/CIA/B3F1; List "Company operated aircraft lost or destroyed", in: UTD/CIA/B1F10; Aircraft accidents 1960, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2; List of Aircraft destroyed or lost, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2).



H-19A H-8 in Laos in 1960/1  
(UTD/Kirkpatrick/B30)

Sikorsky H-19A

H-8

55.141

7 April 60

leased from USAF  
51-3878

**Service history:** received at Seno (L-46), Laos, on 7 April 60 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept. 1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); the first four Air America H-19 pilots arrived in March 60; used to carry CIA officers to meetings in outlying areas and to distribute leaflets during elections (Leary, *CIA Operations in Laos*, p. 55); based at Vientiane, later Bangkok and Pakse, then Vientiane again (before March 61) (UTD/Leary/B1 for 1960); at Vientiane on 27 April 60, without titles; serial painted as "8" (UTD/Kirkpatrick, slide A 5239; a photo is preserved in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B30); had a mid-air collision with Air America H-19A H-1 at Pakse (L-11), Laos, on 13 October 60, damaging the rotor (Aircraft accidents 1960, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2; photo in UTD/Abadie/B2); repaired.

**Fate:** delivered to USOM/Thailand on 10 March 61 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept. 1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); no longer in use in May 62 (Minutes ExCom AACL of 8 May 62, in: UTD/CIA/B7F1); probably given by USOM/Thailand to the Royal Thai Border Patrol Police, Bangkok, as ?, and again involved in an Air America training program for the Thai Police (contract USAID-493-11) in May 62 (Jerry Fink, "Air America and the Thai Police", in: *Air America*

*Log*, vol. VII, no.4, 1973, pp. 4-5). Converted to SH-19A, reportedly to MAP at Tachikawa, Japan, on 11 July 61, later possibly to the South Vietnamese Air Force (e-mail dated 23 Sept. 2003, kindly sent by Johan van der Wai to the author).

**Problems:**

Even years later, Sikorsky H-19s were seen in Laos. In his e-mail to Dr. Erik Carlson dated 2 September 2004 (kindly forwarded to the author), David B. Harrington (LTC USA, Ret.) reports: "I was assigned TDY in Moung Soui during the period Jan - Jul 66. I distinctly remember at least one time when an H-19 was at L-108, sometime during the dry season (March 66?), as I had to guide it in near our hooch, about a half mile away from the strip. It was dusty enough that the helicopter was IFR the last 10 feet or so, and the crew was anything but happy. I have no idea what it's registration was."

This was certainly not an Air America aircraft, but it may have been a military aircraft operating for the US Embassy in Laos (ARMA, RO, or AIRA).

**Errors:**

Several times, Air America H-19s serialised H-A, H-B, H-C, and H-D have been reported. This was an error, as these serials were borne by the first four UH-34Ds of Air America.

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