

# ROYAL LAO AIR FORCE / UTT / *White Horse*: BELL UH-1

by Dr. Joe F. Leeker

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## **Royal Lao Air Force / UTT Flight Detachment UH-1Hs:**

“Since early 1969, the ARMA [= US Army Attaché at Vientiane] also operated a single UH-1D from Korat RTAFB, which was used exclusively to support the assistant ARMA assigned to MR 2. By year’s end, a second UH-1D arrived, and both relocated to Udorn RTAFB. In July 1970, this pair was upgraded to a Utility Tactical Transport Detachment (UTTD) comprising three UH-1H choppers and one Helio Courier flown by U.S. Army pilots.” (Conboy / Morrison, *Shadow war*, p.373 note 3). Peter Liebchen (*MAP Aid to Laos 1959-1972*, pp.110/1) notes: “UH-1D helicopters, in both medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) and gunship (SLICK) versions, temporarily entered RLAF service with the primary aim of supporting the Thai volunteer battalions. Part and parcel of Thai Government acquiescence to the volunteer project was the American promise of fast evacuation of Thai volunteer personnel. While the Secretary of Defense had directed the loan of the UH-1Ds to the RLAF, he was equally firm in directing their return from the RLAF on 1 June.” These UH-1Hs were maintained by Air America’s Udorn facility. Details of the aircraft are quoted from the lists “Assigned, maintained aircraft” between 1 January 72 (PLNG-UTH-72-005) and June 73 (PLNG-UTH-73-154), all preserved in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reels 23/4. As it seems, however, these UH-1Hs did not fly with the RLAF, but with a covert US Army unit called UTT Flight Detachment: “The UTT Flight Detachment was based in Udorn under Project 404 and had 3 UH-1H aircraft and 1 U-10 Helio Courier assigned. We parked our aircraft at the entrance of the Air America Ramp. US ARMY ATTACHE was painted on the doors of the helicopters versus the tail booms. We supported the US Embassy in Vientiane. The 6 UH-1H helicopter you have listed [...] were assigned to the UTT Flight Detachment. The first 3 UH-1H helicopters listed were the original aircraft which were replaced by the newer 3 UH-1H helicopters overnight in early 1972. These helicopters were flown by US Army pilots and crews but maintained by Air America in Udorn. This was a very interesting unit with very interesting aircrews assigned. [...] We normally flew armed. I was a Warrant Officer Helicopter Pilot assigned to the Unit from November 1971 to May 1972” (e-mail dated 14 March 2013 kindly sent by Donald Beaulieu to Paul Oelkrug who forwarded it to the author).

The commander of this unit was the same Major Robert J. “Mo” Moberg who also formed the “White Horse” unit. He recalls: “In late 1970 I was asked to form the UTT Flight Detachment with three UH-1H Hueys and my Helio-Courier, courtesy of the RO (USAID) and Air America. I immediately requested Ted<sup>1</sup> as my Maintenance Officer. We were located at Udorn AFB, Thailand for maintenance and security purposes and flew daily into Laos in support of the Army Attaché, Project 404, and the U.S. Embassy. Colonel Charley Brewington had replaced me at Sam Thong and the NVA had now got into position to put rocket and mortar fire around Sam Thong and 20A. Ted and I flew up to 20A to support Colonel Brewington who had got caught under heavy mortar fire at a site just north of Sam Thong. As we circled overhead talking to Charley on the radio I could see there was a lull of a few seconds between the incoming mortar barrages. I advised Charley that he was going to have to get some air strikes on the enemy mortars before we could land. He said he would if he could but didn’t know where the hell they were coming from. Ted looked at me and asked how many seconds between barrages? I answered about 30. He said, “Well, come on Boss, we can get in there and out in 30 seconds!” I advised Charley that we would be on the ground

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<sup>1</sup> “Ted” was CWO Lucious Theodore Untalan.

approx 10 seconds and to get his ass in the chopper if he wanted to have dinner with us that night. We landed. He did. During takeoff a round exploded under the tail boom causing enough damage for us to return to Vientiane. Ted calmly turned around to me after takeoff and said, "You took 11 seconds!" We made Charley pay for the steaks in Vientiane that night and took the aircraft back to Udorn for tail boom replacement the next day.

"One night during a heavy thunderstorm Ted and I was having a few beers in my little house by the pond in Udorn when the ARMA called me from Vientiane. He said the French Charge de Affairs had crashed in a light aircraft at a location called "Grove Jones" just across the border in Laos Northeast of NKP. He told us the Air Force Jolly Greens at NKP could not or would not go get them and asked if we would try to make the rescue saying he would fly overhead in the DIA U21 for moral support! Ted and I took off IFR to NKP for refueling. I asked NKP radar if they could vector me to the area about 78nm Northeast. They agreed and after refueling and wishing we were flying one of the many CH54s parked on the ramp with Tacans, VORs, weather radar, and everything else available in those days (you name it) we took off at midnight with our fluctuating ADF and inoperable transponder in pouring down rain. The U21 advised they could see the vehicle lights at the crash site through the cloud cover.

"When we arrived overhead Ted started a tight 15 knot spiraling descent through the clouds landing next to the fool who tried to take off in a light Cessna with the Carburetor Heat on. I knew the pilot well who now had a bloody knot on his head, as did the Charge'. We took them back to NKP where they were transferred to the U21 that took them to Bangkok. The Air Force Base commander came out in the rain while we were refueling and congratulated us on a job well done. I advised the Colonel it was just another routine flight for the UTT Flight Detachment. The following day Ambassador Godley summoned the crew and me to his home in Vientiane. After pouring all of us a cognac to go with the morning coffee he said we had done more for US / French relations that night than his whole staff had done since the Indochina War in 1954! I asked him to put it in writing for the crew chief and Ted, I would just as soon have some more of his French Cognac. I don't think he ever did put it in writing." (<http://www.281stahc.org/moberg.html#c>).

### The individual aircraft histories:

Type	serial	c/n (msn)	date acquired	origin
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Bell UH-1H	"6687"	8881	?	US Army 66-16687
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(real serial as borne not known)

**Service history:** current at least January 72 to July 72 with the US Army Attaché Vientiane / UTT Flight Detachment, Udorn (e-mail dated 14 March 2013 kindly sent by Donald Beaulieu to Paul Oelkrug who forwarded it to the author); not current 1 August 72

**Fate:** probably returned to the US Army; reported stored at Corpus Christi, TX (Mitchell/Eastwood, *Military aircraft serials of North America*, p.114).

Bell UH-1H	"6688"	8882	?	US Army 66-16688
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(real serial as borne not known)

**Service history:** current at least January 72 to April 72 with the US Army Attaché Vientiane / UTT Flight Detachment, Udorn (e-mail dated 14 March 2013 kindly sent by Donald Beaulieu to Paul Oelkrug who forwarded it to the author); not current 1 June 72

**Fate:** ?

Bell UH-1H            “7123”            9317            ?            US Army 66-17123

(real serial as borne not known)

**Service history:** current at least January 72 to April 72 with the US Army Attaché Vientiane / UTT Flight Detachment, Udorn (e-mail dated 14 March 2013 kindly sent by Donald Beaulieu to Paul Oelkrug who forwarded it to the author); not current 1 June 72

**Fate:** returned to the US Army as 66-17123 in 1972; with the Delaware ARNG in May 90 (Mitchell/Eastwood, *Military aircraft serials of North America*, p.115); to AMARC, Davis-Monthan AFB, as XA0568 on 6 November 1995.

Bell UH-1H            “0045”            12869            72            US Army 71-20045

(real serial as borne not known)

**Service history:** current at least 1 June 72 to 1 June 73 with the US Army Attaché Vientiane / UTT Flight Detachment, Udorn (e-mail dated 14 March 2013 kindly sent by Donald Beaulieu to Paul Oelkrug who forwarded it to the author);

**Fate:** returned to the US Army in ?; with the Texas ARNG in October 1988 (Mitchell/Eastwood, *Military aircraft serials of North America*, p.129).

Bell UH-1H            “0046”            12870            72            US Army 71-20046

(real serial as borne not known)

**Service history:** current at least 1 June 72 to 1 June 73 with the US Army Attaché Vientiane / UTT Flight Detachment, Udorn (e-mail dated 14 March 2013 kindly sent by Donald Beaulieu to Paul Oelkrug who forwarded it to the author);

**Fate:** 71-20046 made it back to the USA after the war, as it was noted with 1/159 Aviation Regiment, Fort Bragg, NC in October 1991 (e-mail dated 17 January 2015, kindly sent to the author by Sid Nanson).

Bell UH-1H            “0159”            12983            72            US Army 71-20159

(real serial as borne not known)

**Service history:** current at least 1 August 72 to 1 June 73 with the US Army Attaché Vientiane / UTT Flight Detachment, Udorn (e-mail dated 14 March 2013 kindly sent by Donald Beaulieu to Paul Oelkrug who forwarded it to the author);

**Fate:** returned to the US Army in 1973/4?; stored at Camp Robinson, Arkansas, in August 2002; noted May 2004 with US Helicopters at Ozark, AL, apparently destined for the Peruvian Police. “0159” was converted to a UH-1H-II while at US Helicopters. It now belongs to the US Dept. of State Air Wing (Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs) where it does counter-drug work in Peru. On loan to the Peruvian National Police (PNP), it carries their markings including the police registration number PNP-334. It is flown by and maintained by Peruvian Police pilots and mechanics, assisted by DynCorp International LLC instructor pilots and maintenance Technical Advisors (TAs). I believe it is still on an N-number in the FAA registry, somewhere... We have a total of 22 UH-IIs in country with all major “Phase” maintenance carried out in our Main Operating Base in Pucallpa.” (e-mail dated 13 October 2009 that John Daughtry, Lt Col, USAF (Ret), Peru Deputy Country Manager / Operations, DynCorp International LLC, kindly sent to Paul Oelkrug, who forwarded it the author).

The following aircraft probably arrived after Air America’s Udorn facility had been sold:

Bell UH-1H            “1601”            13300            74?    US Army 72-21601

**(real serial as borne not known)**

**Service history:** noted in June 74 according to *World Air Forces Directory*, 1998, p.275

**Fate:** ?

Bell UH-1H            “1602”            13301            74?    US Army 72-21602

**(real serial as borne not known)**

**Service history:** noted in June 74 according to *World Air Forces Directory*, 1998, p.275

**Fate:** to the Royal Thai Army as “1602” in ?; noted in May 2006.

Bell UH-1H            “1603”            13302            74?    US Army 72-21603

**(real serial as borne not known)**

**Service history:** noted in June 74 according to *World Air Forces Directory*, 1998, p.275

**Fate:** to the Royal Thai Army as “1603” in ?; noted April 1996 thru January 2007.

Bell UH-1H            “1604”            13303            74?    US Army 72-21604

**(real serial as borne not known)**

**Service history:** noted in June 74 according to *World Air Forces Directory*, 1998, p.275

**Fate:** to the Royal Thai Army as “1604” in ?; noted in January 1999; wfu at Lopburi by January 2007.

**“White Horse” UH-1Ms maintained by Air America at Udorn:**



An unknown UH-1M taken by Tom Lum, believed to be a “White Horse” aircraft (photo no.VA024798, No Date, Allen Cates Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, with kind permission from Steve Maxner)

In the fall of 1971, 10 US Army Bell UH-1Ms were brought from South Vietnam to Udorn, Thailand for use in Laos under the command of Major Bob Moberg. These helicopters were outfitted with the M21 combination of two outriggered 7.62mm miniguns and a pair of seven-shot rocket pods. They were flown by 26 Thai pilots, who had previously been trained at Vung Tau in South Vietnam, on medevac missions to support the Thai *Unity* volunteer forces fighting in Laos, especially in MR 2. Their call-sign was “White Horse”. Every evening they all had to return to Udorn Royal Thai AFB (Conboy / Morrison, *Shadow war*, pp. 303/4). The color scheme of the helicopters was overall Olive Drab with no identification markings or national insignia. A photo can be seen in Conboy, *War in Laos*, p. 56. In 1973, these “White Horse” UH-1Ms had a white horse painted on the nose - see the photo of a “White Horse” UH-1M taken at Pakse Air Base in April 73 in: Conboy, *War in Laos*, back cover.

Major Bob Moberg recalls some details of flying the “White Horse” helicopters: “In early 1971 I was asked to organize and form the “White Horse” Gun Platoon with 10 UH-1M gunships of my choice from Vietnam. All the pilots and crews were Thai. I flew to Vietnam and picked out the best 10 of 14 “Mike” models in the country. While the aircraft were being prepared for transfer I sent ten Thai Army, fourteen Thai Air Force, and three Thai Police pilots along with twice as many crew chiefs to Vung Tau, Vietnam for transition and training in the UH1M with the XM21 gun systems (7.62 Mini-Guns and rocket pods). After they had completed training I flew back to Bien Hoa, Vietnam to lead them to Udorn over the Ho Chi Minh Trail, refueling and arming at Kontum enroute. I became a bit nostalgic as I walked around the old Project Delta FOB compound where I had been with the 281<sup>st</sup> in 1968. It was deserted and only a few ARVN soldiers were there to provide security for our stopover. One of the aircraft had a severe vertical vibration and the Thai crew didn’t want to fly it. Determined to get all 10 of my aircraft to Thailand I decided to fly it. The ‘vertical’ was so

bad I couldn't go over 50 knots without permanent damage to my eyeteeth and hemorrhoids.

"As we were staggering along over the 'Trail' at 5000 feet I thought I had made a severely bad decision. We were supposed to have A1E escort across the 'Trail' but the "Sandy's" never showed up until we were on short final to Pakse, Laos. My Thai counter-part (a Thai Air Force Colonel with no rank insignia!) wanted to spend the night at Pakse. I insisted that we continue on to Udorn arriving after dark. When I had the runway at Udorn in sight I ordered "Go Trail" and we were cleared for landing to the median next to runway 36. After landing to a hover and starting to move toward our parking area I could hear a lot of excitement over the radio. Two aircraft had landed in a rice paddy outside the approach to the Air Base, two had made it to Udorn AFB with me, the three Police Pilots had landed at the Border Patrol Police airstrip on the other side of town, and the two others had landed in the middle of Udorn town at the main intersection. We didn't find the last aircraft until the next day. He had landed in the local prison football field with a 40 foot wall around him and the crew had been arrested. It was apparent to me that the U.S. Army had not trained these pilots to fly simple night operations much less combat operations in Laos. I needed help! So I requested Ted Untalan as my Deputy and maintenance officer. After the sad loss of an aircraft with five crewmen due to vertigo when returning from Laos in bad weather I demanded a halt to operations until Ted and I had given 25 hours under the 'Hood' and a check ride to each White Horse pilot.

"During an operation at Xieng Lom in Northern Laos Ted and I took three Gunships to support a Thai battalion commander (West Point graduate) who later became the Commander of the Thai First Army and then Permanent Secretary of Defense of the Royal Thai Government. The General is now a Privy Counselor to the King. The Battalion was backed up on a ridge with many KIA and 7 WIA with the Colonel. We had been requested to provide gunship support for Air America helicopters working in the area to get the wounded out. [...] Ted had mounted a .50 Cal machine gun in one of our aircraft because we were having so many maintenance problems with the mini-guns. I dropped the rocket pods off of my gunship and made the pick up of the WIA while Ted placed a wall of .50 Cal fire around me. I was never shot at that I know of. I retired in 1972." (<http://www.281stahc.org/moberg.html#c>).

Between 1 March 72 and May 73, most of the time, only 8 or 9 of these "White Horse" Bell UH-1Ms appeared on the lists of aircraft that were maintained by Air America's Udorn facility (Lists "Assigned, maintained aircraft" as of 1 March 72 and May 73, in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reels 23/4):

UH-1M	66-15107	c/n 1835
UH-1M	66-15128	c/n 1856
UH-1M	66-15145	c/n 1873
UH-1M	66-15181	c/n 1909
UH-1M	66-15185	c/n 1913; mounted on a post in front of the Guard base at Waterloo, IA, on 7 August 2001
UH-1M	66-15188	c/n 1916
UH-1M	66-15193	c/n 1921
UH-1M	66-15218	c/n 1946
UH-1M	66-15240	c/n 1968 reportedly written off on 11 March 72 at coordinates AA6600000 ("Aircraft All Loss by Tail number", pages 135-287, no date, Folder 15, Box 10, Garnett Bell Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, details kindly sent to the author by Sid Nanson on 2 June 2011). It crashed just north of Vientiane in a violent thunderstorm, killing at least 4 crew members (Leary, Note "Battle for Skyline Ridge, 1972", p.11,

formerly in: UTD/Leary/Ser.I, B23F6, now probably in:  
UTD/Leary/B4F1 or B54F2).

UH-1M          66-15242          c/n 1970

After the ceasefire, the UH-1Ms were prepared for storage at Udorn.



Two photos of the same UH-1M being prepared for storage at Udorn in September 73 and a couple of days later, both taken by Ward S. Reimer  
(with kind permission from Ward S. Reimer)

Bell UH-1C          “66-15094“          1822          ?          US Army 66-15094

**Service history:** this was a US Army helicopter operating in Laos, not a RLAF aircraft, as has been reported. Helicopter #094 was shot down on 05 March 71 during Operation Lam Son 719 / LZ Sophia. The last unit was the 174th Assault Helicopter Company Sharks, US Army.

**Fate:** written off 5 March 71 (Mitchell/Eastwood, *Military aircraft serials of North America*, p.111); noted in a damaged condition at the *Musée de l'Armée Populaire*, Vientiane, Laos, in the summer of 2003. A photo of the wreck can be found at <http://www.abpic.co.uk/photo/1355396/> .

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