AIR AMERICA: SIKORSKY H-19A (S-55)  
by Dr. Joe F. Leeker

First published on 15 August 2003, last updated on 24 August 2015

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>registration / serial</th>
<th>c/n (msn)</th>
<th>date acquired</th>
<th>origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sikorsky H-19A</td>
<td>H-1</td>
<td>55.127</td>
<td>16 March 60</td>
<td>leased from USAF 51-3871</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 taxying (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

**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 Nhóm, 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 serialled 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.

© University of Texas at Dallas, 2003-2015