Air America in Cambodia – LMAT and the Khmer Air Force
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A) The historical background

During the sixties, the relations between the United States and the Kingdom of Cambodia were not particularly good. With some interruptions and modifications, Prince Norodom Sihanouk had been head of the state since 1941, and he had always tried to keep off the Vietnam war by declaring Cambodia a neutral country. Nevertheless, fighting had started in Cambodia about 1957. But Prince Sihanouk’s way of maintaining this “neutrality” was to close both of his eyes to the North Vietnamese activities in his country and to accept that the Communists could build up large sanctuaries along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the eastern part of Cambodia. At the same time, Prince Sihanouk severed diplomatic relations with Thailand (in October 61), the Republic of South Vietnam (in August 1963) und the United States (on 3 May 1965).

It was since 1965, that the “Ho Chi Minh Trail” in Laos and Cambodia was attacked by US fighter bombers. Nevertheless, the eastern region of Cambodia, where the North Vietnamese had built up sanctuaries along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, remained the place, where the Communist troops could retreat, when they were driven back, as it happened in March 67, when the remainder of the 2,500 Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army troops that had attacked the US Army camp in the Michelin rubber plantation some 20 miles northeast of Tay Ninh and had been defeated by USAF F-4s from Cam Ranh Bay and USAF F-100s from Bien Hoa flying more than 5,000 support sorties, were pushed back into Cambodia.

This political situation remained more or less the same, until Prince Sihanouk lost his power in March 1970 while he was abroad for a medical treatment. Because of the constant North Vietnamese incursions into Cambodia on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the Cambodian National Assembly had voted Prince Sihanouk out of office on 18 March 1970. Before that date, the USAF had secretly carried out 3,630 B-52 strikes against Hanoi’s sanctuaries in Cambodia. When the pro-Western General Lon Nol seized power in Cambodia in March 1970, he immediately ordered all North Vietnamese troops to leave Cambodia within 72 hours. When they failed to comply, Lon Nol allowed US and South Vietnamese forces to attack the Ho Chi Minh Trail and North Vietnamese sanctuaries in Cambodia. On 4 April 1970, 50,000 people gathered in Washington to protest President Nixon’s conduct of war. But although President Nixon announced on 21 April that 150,000 more American troops were to be withdrawn from Vietnam, on 30 April 1970, US and South Vietnamese troops crossed the border into Cambodia, and Prince Sihanouk departed into exile to China. This full-scale invasion was supported by USAF F-4 and B-52 strikes as well as South Vietnamese and US fixed-wing gunships. But as President Nixon had promised that the operation should be limited in time, all troops had returned to South Vietnam by 29 June 1970. Although this


2 Sutsakhan, The Khmer Republic at war, p.11.

3 Operation Menu, between 17 March 69 and 26 May 70 (Department of Defense, “Report on selected air and ground operations in Cambodia and Laos”, dated 10 September 73, pp. 3 + 5-18, in: UTD/Leary/B53F1).
incursion had been a military success, as huge quantities of enemy supplies and ammunition had been captured, it was also a political failure: Protests against the US involvement in South East Asia became so massive, that the administration of Kent State University, Ohio, moved the National Guard against the protesting students: Four dead and ten injured students had to be deplored, and from now on, the whole US nation was divided between supporters and enemies of the war in Asia, and the very name of Vietnam became a symbol of divisions on the US domestic scene that were wrenching the country apart. On 9 October 1970, Cambodia changed its name to become the Khmer Republic. In January 71, South Vietnamese and Cambodian troops temporarily reopened Route 4 from Phnom Penh to Kompong Som on the Gulf of Thailand, but the political and military situation got worse very quickly. On 21/2 January 71, a Communist sapper attack on Phnom Penh’s airport destroyed some 30 aircraft, including nine tenth of Cambodia’s air force. Lon Nol promptly ordered Cambodian troops from outlying towns to positions closer to the capital, thus giving the North Vietnamese still more space to move in the rest of the country. And Lon Nol’s forces suffered a lot of more defeats in 1971 and 1972, in spite of air strikes against Communist AAA and SAM sites in Cambodia ordered by General Lavelle, commander of the 7th US Air Force, in 1971 and early 1972, and by the spring of 1973, most roads out of Phnom Penh were blocked by the enemy. Furthermore, the political relations with South Vietnam quickly cooled down so that Bangkok became the new life-line for Cambodia.

While the cease-fire agreements of 1973 meant the official end of hostilities in South Vietnam and Laos, for Cambodia, that year was only the beginning of a civil war. Lon Nol had ordered a unilateral suspension of offensive operations by government troops, effective 29 January 1973, but this was ignored by the Communists, as were other offers made on 6 July 73 and on 9 July 1974. So fighting continued, and USAF F-111As continued bombing Cambodia until 15 August 1973, when all US air strikes in Cambodia were ceased upon request of the US Congress. This was Congress’ Cooper-Church Amendment, which stripped the US President of authority to commit forces into Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, including a congressional ban on use of aerial weapons in South East Asia. But in late 1973, a military assistance and advisory program organized by the Thailand Liaison Detachment, Bangkok, commanded by Major General Mellen, was created, a special task force reporting directly to the Pentagon and with order to coordinate on the war in Cambodia. On 8 October 73, Brigadier General Aderholt became Mellen’s deputy, and one of the first steps taken by the detachment was to take the Water Pump unit out of the 56th ACW and to transform it into a training unit for Khmer Air Force pilots, reporting to the Thailand Liaison Detachment, and this Khmer Air Force training program was carried out at Udorn, Thailand. This was a wise decision, as without US air support, Lon Nol’s government was in grave danger to collapse, as popular support had been undermined to a very dangerous extent by rampant inflation, corruption, and lack of security. But there was the hope that sustained US airlift support and improved Khmer tactical air capabilities might give the Lon Nol government a chance of survival. So even before the end of US air strikes in Cambodia, that is since 11 April 73, USAF C-130s had been flying both air-land and airdrop missions to Cambodia out of U Tapao, hauling weapons, ammunition, fuel, and rice to Phnom Penh and the besieged provincial enclaves in Cambodia. But maybe encouraged by the end of US air strikes and by this critical situation, the same year, the left-wing extremist faction, backed by China and calling itself the Khmer Rouge, began a fanatical and vicious civil war in the entire territory of Cambodia, during the end of which the capital of Phnom Penh had to be nourished by a

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5 Castle, *At war*, p.108. According to the Cooper-Church Amendment passed in late December 1970, US military forces were prohibited from “operating on the ground inside Cambodia or Laos”.
6 Trest, *Air Commando One*, pp.232-41 + 250.
continuous air bridge made by some 25 very short-lived cargo charter airlines known as the “pig pilots”, the most famous of which being South East Asia Air Transport and the TRI-9 Corporation. This air bridge had become even more essential, as after the bombing halt of August 73, US officials became concerned that USAF C-130s might be shot down, with a loss of US armed forces personnel. Already in May 74, Brigadier General Aderholt recommended Bird Air to be offered an airlift contract to operate USAF C-130s out of U Tapao. So, on 26 August 74, the primary flying contract with Bird Air was signed, and on 4 September 74 a contract with Thai Airways covering support services, and 5 unmarked USAF C-130Es were handed over to Bird Air, who promptly hired retired USAF C-130 crewmen and reservists to provide 5 aircrews, capable of making five delivery sorties into Cambodia daily or as many as ten if necessary, and the first airdrop made by the contract crew was flown on 26 September 74.

In January 1975, the Khmer Rouge bombarded the city of Phnom Penh with rocket and mortar shells. As the Mekong River route had been cut off for supplies, the city had to rely on a heavy airlift now done in great part by Bird Air crews flying in C-130s obtained from the USAF, whose maximum gross weight for operations was upgraded to 185,000 pounds. When the siege on Phnom Penh tightened in late February and March 75, the airlift was expanded to include commercial DC-8s of Airlift International and World Airways hauling rice between Saigon and Phnom Penh. On 1 April 1975, President Lon Nol left the country. On 11 April 75, Bird Air C-130 air-land-missions were suspended, because the following day, on 12 April 75, Operation Eagle Pull, carried out by USMC CH-53As, brought out of Phnom Penh the remaining US Embassy staff and some private American citizens. On 13 April 1975, Lieutenant General Sak Sutsakhan, Chief of the General Staff, Khmer Armed Forces, became the last Chief of State of the Khmer Republic. But the situation was already dramatic: On 12 April a T-28 tried to bomb the new government, and on 15 April 75, the airport of Pochentong fell to the enemy. Between 11 April and 17 April 75, 97 Khmer aircraft were evacuated to Thailand, including 50 T-28s, 7 AC-47s and 10 C-123Ks. On 17 April 1975, the situation had become desperate: That day, the government surrendered to the Communists.

What followed was to be the most barbarian régime South East Asia knew in the 20th century: In the new state called Democratic Kampuchea, the Pol Pot government ordered the population of the cities to be evacuated to the surrounding countryside, mostly rice fields, so that nearly the entire country became a labor camp. More than one million people were either executed or died from hunger, disease, or maltreatment in what became known as the Killing Fields. On 25 December 1978, Vietnamese troops conquered Cambodia, establishing a puppet government under Heng Sam Rin and proclaiming the People’s Republic of Kampuchea on 7 January 1979. But at that time, the population had already been reduced by perhaps 30 per cent. A civil war began, in which three armies fought against the Vietnamese invaders - the KPNLAF or Khmer People National Liberation Armed Forces of Son Sann backed by the

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8 Trest, Air Commando One, pp.242/3. All military and national markings had been removed, except for a tiny serial number on the tail and the camouflage scheme; the aircraft were based at U-Tapao in Thailand (Grandolini/Cooper/Troung, Cambodia, part 2).
9 Trest, Air Commando One, pp.247-50.
10 Between 11 April 73 and 17 April 75, USAF and later Bird Air C-130Es as well as contracted DC-8s flew 5,413 air-land missions in support of the Khmer Republic, delivering more than 123,000 short tons of rice, ammunition, fuel and other supplies. The C-130Es flew more than 3,000 missions airdropping nearly 40,000 short tons of rice and ammunition to Khmer enclaves. This was more than three times the tonnage delivered to Khe Sanh in 1968 and probably the largest airlift operations since the Berlin airlift of 1948-49 (Trest, Air Commando One, p.250).
11 Sutsakhan, The Khmer Republic at war, pp.164/5.
12 Sutsakhan, The Khmer Republic at war, pp.166/7.
13 Trest, Air Commando One, pp.250/1.
United States, the ANS or *Armée Nationale Sihanoukiste* lead by Prince Sihanouk’s son Ranariddh, and the *Khmer Rouge* of Pol Pot supported by Red China. The Vietnamese troops withdrew from Cambodia only in September 1989. A peace-treaty was signed at Paris on 23 October 91, and a Supreme National Council of Cambodia was founded, destined to unite the four parties of the civil war. From 15 March 92 to 28 May 93, Cambodia was governed by the UNITAC or *United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia*. As a result of the elections of 23 and 28 May 93, on 24 September 93, Prince Sihanouk was proclaimed King of the new *Kingdom of Cambodia*.\(^\text{14}\)

**B) Air America in Cambodia**

After fighting had started in Cambodia in 1957 and after US pressure had forced the South Vietnamese forces that had invaded Cambodia in June 58 to withdraw, CAT Inc. made a contract with USOM Cambodia in 1958 for Piper Apache Flying Service.\(^\text{15}\) This contract was later taken over by Air America and during the early sixties, one Air America Apache was based at Phnom Penh.\(^\text{16}\) "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."\(^\text{17}\) These flights were also operated for the US Embassy at Phnom Penh.

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\(^{14}\) Neuhauser, *Kambodscha*, pp.95-111.

\(^{15}\) Contract no. 58-029 with USOM/Cambodia for Piper Apache Flying Service, plus Supplemental Agreements no. 1, 2, 3, and 4, all mentioned in: Memorandum “Contract Administration” dated 27 July 1962, by Jerry Fink, in: UTD/Fink/B2F16.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{16}\) Minutes of Meeting of Executive Committee of Air America Inc. of 12 February 63, in: UTD/CIA/B3F4; Minutes of Meeting of Executive Committee of Air Asia Company Limited and Air America Inc of 10 December 63, in: UTD/CIA/B7F2.

\(^{17}\) 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,\(^\text{18}\) and possibly Air America’s Apache was also used for contacts with them. It was the presence of those CIA-supported Khmer Serei troops that, instigated by Peking, made Sihanouk renounce US aid altogether on 19 November 1963.\(^\text{19}\) And the tensions between Prince Sihanouk and the US grew and grew, and in 1964, Sihanouk even expelled the US MAAG advisory mission, so that all technical support for US delivered aircraft ceased.\(^\text{20}\) And on 7 January 1964, Air America’s Apache N3183P was definitely transferred from Phnom Penh to Saigon,\(^\text{21}\) and no follow-on contract ever existed.\(^\text{22}\) This situation remained unchanged, as long as Prince Sihanouk reigned in Cambodia, but when General Lon Nol took over control of the country, Air America aircraft started to reappear in Cambodia. In September 70, the Lon Nol-government even began a (short-lived) cooperation with the Royal Lao Government, sending recruits to a training camp at PS 18 in southern Laos.\(^\text{23}\) Also “in September 1970, e separate training program for Khmer commando teams had been initiated at the camp. By year’s end, 15 detachments – named Toro Teams – were undergoing instruction. Graduating by March 1971, they were flown aboard Air America S-58T choppers

![Air America S-58T XW-PHE at Udorn in 1973](image)

(with kind permission from the photographer, Ward Reimer)

(added to the Air America inventory specifically with team insertions in mind) into Cambodia’s Stung Treng and Ratanakiri provinces, where they remained in the field for up to a month reporting on PAVN tail traffic. In June, 90 remaining Toro commandos were repatriated from PS 18 to Phnom Penh for integration into FANK [= Forces Armées Nationales Khmer], all but bringing to an end serious military cooperation between the RLG and Khmer Republic.\(^\text{24}\)

Air America’s operations in Cambodia have longtime been a mystery. Now, the following is known: In June 72, Oren B. Harnage had several HRT-2 beacons placed in Cambodia, probably using an Air America PC-6 Porter. The beacons were placed at Battambang in the west of the country, at Simerab on the west bank of Tonle Sap Lake, and at Kampong-Nhai-

\(\text{19}\) Sutsakhan, *The Khmer Republic at war*, p. 9.
\(\text{20}\) Grandolini/Cooper/Troung, *Cambodia*, part 1, p.9.
\(\text{22}\) Valid contract list as of 7 July 64, part of “Aircraft status” as of 7 July 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1.
\(\text{23}\) For details, see my file *Air America in Laos II 2* under the heading Supporting the “Secret War” on the ground.
\(\text{24}\) Conboy / Morrison, *Shadow war*, p. 284.
Between 22 and 24 June 72, Ralph N. Begien III, Air America’s Operations Specialist (OPSP) from Saigon, made a trip to Phnom Penh to contact a new customer, MEDTC. He reports: “It was only a matter of a few hours after I arrived in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and was briefed by the MEDTC Travel/Liaison Branch, that I was convinced that the requirements of our new customer, the Military Equipment Delivery Team, Cambodia, was tailor made for Air America; their mission is our cup of tea. This team, composed of some 72, hard picked men from the US Armed-Forces, plan, program, order, assist in shipment, distribute, and make end item use inspections (EIUI) of military equipment provided to the FANK (Khmer National Armed Forces). The latter have grown from 30,000 to 180,000 in the last two years. While this team is precluded by law from instructing or advising, they are required by statute law to conduct end item use inspections and herein lies the need for Air America assets. With the phasing out of regularly scheduled MACV helicopters previously provided to MEDTC for ‘EIUI’ inspections in the field, Air America has been selected to provide this scheduled transportation for the ‘EIUI’ teams. We would, on occasion, fly other type missions such as VIP flights, etc. (The team has parachute enthusiasts, evidently, as I was asked if we had a static line in the 204B). MACV will continue to fly ‘red-carpet’ flights when chase gunships are required. Air America will carry wounded, on occasion, when ‘EIUI’ teams are departing sites where injuries have been sustained.”

“As envisioned at the time of my departure from Phnom Penh we will provide one chopper, twice a week (on Tuesdays and Thursdays) to fly at customer direction out of Phnom Penh and a Volpar once a week to fly Saigon/Phnom Penh/Saigon. MEDTC Travel/Liaison Branch (similar to A20A and A20B Air Operations Branch) discussed the desirability of having the option to utilize a Caribou and/or C-123 in lieu of the Volpar when the requirement existed. Additionally the members of this branch discussed the desirability of utilizing our fixed wing aircraft into airfields other than Pochectiong as well as some RVN airfields along the RVN/Cambodia border. MEDTC is sharing the cost of the major portion of this agreement with the Defense Attaché Office, the latter paying 40%. The Attaché Office (Colonel Brownell (SP?) queried me about utilization of aircraft on days other than that for which they were scheduled. Additionally could they cancel on a scheduled day and fly on an unscheduled day. In view of the fact that the agreement is with CORDS and not with Air America, I advised the Colonel that both these questions would have to be directed to CORDS. It would be helpful to MEDTC and DAO if a CORDS Representative would pay a visit to Phnom Penh in order to clarify several questions which were put to me concerning aircraft availability.”

“Colonel Turnipseed (MEDTC) stated he wanted our aircraft to fly as MACV military aircraft which would be under a tactical clearance. Both MEDTC and DAO stated that under this clearance we would have no problem with Cambodian authorities and that we would not have to refile once we entered Cambodia or to return to RVN. Air America, in Saigon, has had difficulty flying under a tactical clearance in the past. I recommend AAM/CORDS take steps as soon as possible to facilitate this clearance with RVN authorities. IMMIGRATION / CUSTOMS – Under a tactical clearance crews are not required to ‘chop in’ or go through customs. MEDTC stated we would not be required to do so in Cambodia. […] At present there are no plans to RON crews. MEDTC controller stated quarters and security of the aircraft would be provided. In an emergency the crews will RON. […] FANK forces are spread out in an area comprising roughly 30% of the country (an estimated 13 friendly / usable airfield are within this western half of Cambodia), the remaining 70% of the country is

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generally designated ‘Indian Country’ controlled by 4-5 NVA Divisions. Our customer requirements lie within the 30% portion where the FANK’s are located. The FANK, who could be compared to the ARVN in 1963, are reporting increased enemy activity to the south and east of Phnom Penh along the Cambodia border.”

This report explains the situation Air America operations faced in Cambodia. All Air America aircraft serving Cambodia were based outside the country,29 that is mostly at Saigon, and all Air America flights to and within Cambodia were operated under contracts that had originally been made not for Cambodia, but for South Vietnam: contracts no. USAID/VN-100 and later USAID/SA-C-1029. Flights operated to or within Cambodia were distinguished by the respective costumer, but these customer numbers were the same as for flights within South Vietnam, e.g. A30A standing for CORDS or USAID and A30B for the U.S. Embassy or CIA.30 Although Air America mostly flew around MEDTC inspection teams, these operations were not financed by MEDTC, but by CORDS (60 %) and by the DAO, i.e. by the US Embassy (40 %). So these flights appeared as part of the contracts Air America had with CORDS. The reason for this was probably the Symington-Case Amendment, passed in February 1972, which ordered that the total number of official US personnel in Cambodia – military and civilian, including people on temporary duty – should not exceed 200. In addition, there could not be more than 85 third-country nationals present in Cambodia who were being paid directly or indirectly from US MAP funds.31

When due to enemy actions Route 5 remained closed in September 72, interrupting the rice supply, rice looting and demonstrations in the capital urged the government to react quickly, and so Air America was requested under contract no. VN-100 to furnish the services of 2 Caribous, 1 C-123 and 1 C-46 to transport rice to Cambodia.32 The result was that between 11 and 18 September 1972, the first rice shipments to Phnom Penh by air33 were flown in by Air America, when Air America 1 C-46s and 2 Caribous as well as one China Air Lines C-123 (ST-1) and two C-46s (CA-1 and CA-2), subcontracted to Air America, flew 162 round trip flights from Saigon to Phnom Penh airlifting a total of 1,711,900 pounds of rice. These flights were operated under the VN-100/A30A contract.34

On 7 January 73, Air America’s Phnom Penh station reports that “Pochentong Airbase was the subject of three separate mortar/rocket attacks today. No Company personnel or equipment were sustained. However, KAF was not so lucky”.35 In July 73, Air America’s Saigon base put an emphasis on operations in Cambodia: Mr. Reed Chase made numerous trips to Phnom Penh to assist in training Radio Operators. Other Air America people made several trips to Cambodia to help Operations at Phnom Penh.36 This may have become necessary, after Air America UH-1H “20112” (msn 12936) had been hit by small arms fire some 5.5 nautical miles south of Phnom Penh (C-01) on 6 July 73, while operating from Kongpon Spen (C-29) to Phnom Penh (C-01) under contract VN-100/A30B, carrying 7

29 Probably in 1971, one Air America PC-6 was temporarily positioned at Phnom Penh upon receipt of request from the Station Chief and was under his direction for supporting existing CIA programs (Harnage, A thousand faces, p.91).
31 Minutes of Meeting of Executive Committee of Air Asia Company Limited and Air America Inc of 12 September 72, in: UTD/CIA/B9F7; Saigon Base monthly report for September 72, in: UTD/CIA/B41F7.
32 Sutsakhan, The Khmer Republic at war, p.111; Air America received a commendation from the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) for this airlift, which is online readable on the CIA website located at http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/15/c05266412.pdf and also at http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/15/c05266411.pdf.
33 Sutsakhan, The Khmer Republic at war, p.111; Air America received a commendation from the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) for this airlift, which is online readable on the CIA website located at http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/15/c05266412.pdf and also at http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/15/c05266411.pdf.
Cambodians. But Air America did not only operate flights between Phnom Penh and several regional airstrips, but also lots of direct cargo flights from Saigon, using Company C-46s (e.g. N1383N on 21 July 74) and DHC-4s (e.g. N11014 on 30 May 74 or on 27 July 74) as well as C-123Ks of its subcontractor China Airlines. In that way, direct Air America flights linked Saigon with Phnom Penh (C-01) and with Battambang (C-09) in the west and Svay Rieng (C-49) in the east of Cambodia, while China Airlines served Phnom Penh and Svay Rieng. In October 73, Air America C-46s operated a big rice airlift from Saigon into Cambodia under the VN-100 contract. On 4 November 73, Air America PC-6C N185K incurred a tail wheel damage in Cambodia (at Bannak, C-54), but as the pilot considered the place to be unsafe for an extended ground time, he ferried the aircraft back to Saigon. Indeed, two of China Airlines’ C-123Ks were lost on return flights from Cambodia while operating under contract 70-34 for Air America: ST-3 (msn 20192) was en route from Svay Rieng to Saigon, when it had to make an emergency landing 5 kms SW of Tay Ninh (V-151) on 13 May 74, and ST-4 (msn 20304) was en route from Phnom Penh to Saigon, when it was shot down near Moc Hoa.

Air America flights to Cambodia in 1975:
2 Bell 204Bs to be ferried to and positioned at Phnom Penh (C-01) on 5 January 75 (Advance Schedule for 5 January), hidden as “customer-directed” flights (1st Press Schedule for 5 Jan.), and Volpar N7770B plus China Airlines C-47 “EM-4” flying into Cambodia on 9 April 75 (Saigon Daily Flight Schedules, in: UTD/Walker/B31F6) (V-51) on 27 July 74. In January and February 1975, Air America temporarily positioned up to 2 helicopters at Phnom Penh (C-01), and sometimes, the Saigon Daily Flight Schedules show the dates when the helicopters were ferried there and returned to Saigon: For example, on 5 January 75, Messrs. Fonburg, Tuoi and Thanh as well as Hitchman, Lieu and Toan departed Saigon at 6.50 a.m. to fly 2 Bell 204Bs to Phnom Penh (C-01), where the crews were to remain for 3 nights. But they returned to Saigon as deadheads on 6 January, and on 7 January, 2 other crews were sent to Phnom Penh (C-01) to ferry the 2 Bell 204Bs back to Saigon. On 9 January 75, 2 more crews were sent to Phnom Penh to ferry 2 other aircraft back to Saigon. And on 22 February 75, Messrs. Greenway, Ritchie, and Thong were flown to

37 Saigon base monthly reports for October and November 73, in: UTD/CIA/B42F2.
Phnom Penh (C-01) as deadheads – probably in a customer-directed UH-1H piloted by Messrs. Wood, Riley, and Phi – and then ferried another aircraft from Phnom Penh back to Saigon. It seems that sometimes, Air America’s helicopter flights to Phnom Penh (C-01) appeared in those Saigon Daily Flight Schedules just as “special” or “customer-directed” (“C”) flights, in order to keep them more secret – probably because the Symington-Case Amendment of February 1972 ordered that the total number of official US personnel in Cambodia – military and civilian, including people on temporary duty – should not exceed 200, plus not more than 85 third-country nationals paid directly or indirectly from US MAP funds.

Air America UH-1H “20112” in 1973 (UTD/Dexter/F1)

From a CIA paper dated 26 February 75 and released in September 2009, we are quite well informed about Air America operations in Cambodia: “1. Air America performs flying services in Cambodia under contract [erased, i.e. AID/SA-C-1029]. This contract is an umbrella contract in support of varying agencies in South Vietnam and Cambodia, i.e. AID, Department of State, CIA, DAO and SAAFO. Often times the same aircraft performs services for more than one agency during a single mission. The Air America aircraft primarily is utilized in transporting personnel and supplies as requested by and in support of U.S. Mission agencies as noted above. 2. No American personnel nor aircraft of Air America are permanently assigned in Cambodia. The permanent Air America staff in Cambodia is limited to one Filipino and four Cambodians. An additional three technicians commute daily from Saigon to Phnom Penh to provide technical support to Air America aircraft. It has been Company policy since December 1974 not to have Air America aircraft or crews remain overnight (RON) in Phnom Penh. Normally one helicopter flies to Phnom Penh daily and remains there on alert to perform search and rescue (SAR) missions on an on-call basis in the event other aircraft have an incident requiring emergency pickup of crew members. Occasionally this aircraft will RON at Phnom Penh when it’s too late to safely fly back to Saigon, although, when this occurs, the crews will be ferried back to Saigon by another Air America aircraft. None of the Air America aircraft operating in Vietnam and Cambodia are

38 For all these details see: Saigon Daily Flight Schedules for the 1 January 75 to 23 February 75 period, in: UTD/Walker/B31F6.
40 Probably the CIA Station at Saigon.
41 DAO = the Defense Attaché Office, Saigon.
42 SAAFO = Special Assistant to the Ambassador for Field Operations (http://www.allacronyms.com/SAAFO), which probably means the CIA Station at Phnom Penh.
43 One such case happened on 1 February 75, when UH-1H “20104” remained overnight at Phnom Penh because of darkness and the crew was dead-headed back to Saigon on Caribou N11014 (Var M. Green [VP-SVND], South Vietnam Monthly Report to CEO for February 75, p. 1, online readable at http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1818029/197546.pdf ).
armed nor do they provide direct support to military operations.” Indeed, as former Air America pilot Samuel Jordan recalled, much of Air America’s flying in and into Cambodia was refugee relief work. The 3rd paragraph has some statistics:

In January 75, three Air America aircraft suffered from hostile actions while in Cambodia: On 13 January 75, Volpar N7770B came under mortar fire upon touchdown on the runway at Prey Veng (C-51), turned around and departed the area. So UH-1Hs “20104” and “20110” were dispatched from Saigon (V-01) to Prey Veng (C-51) to pickup the customers left there. Both helicopters then remained overnight at Phnom Penh (C-01). On 19 January 75, UH-1Hs “20104” and “20010” were on the ground at Neak Luong (C-48), when 2 rockets impacted near the airstrip. Immediate action was taken to depart the area. On 22 January 75, the same 2 UH-1Hs, “20104” and “20010”, were on the ramp at Phnom Penh (C-01), when 5 rockets impacted on the main ramp of the airfield – fortunately without any damage to the aircraft and their occupants. In February 75, there were almost 20 unfriendly actions against Air America aircraft in Cambodia. Most of them were rockets or mortar shells that struck on the ramp or near the airstrip quite close to the aircraft, mostly at Phnom Penh (C-01), but some of them also at Neak Luong (C-48) and Kampong Cham (C-07). However, in most cases, there were no personnel injuries or damage to the aircraft. The aircraft involved were C-46 N9458Z, Caribou N11014, Volpar N9157Z, PC-6C N192K, UH-1Hs “20104” and “20110” as well as Bell 204Bs N8513F, N8514F, and N1305X. Also in February 75, Air America was requested to add one DC-4 to the C-1029 contract as a call aircraft that could be used for an emergency food airlift, but that had to be declined due to manning problems. There were even some flights into Cambodia as late as early April 75: On 6 and on 9 April,

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44 Memo dated 26 February 75, Air Advisor – DDA to Office of General Counsel, regarding Air America Activities in Cambodia.
45 Interview with Samuel Jordan conducted by Timothy Castle, on the DVD to the booklet: Air America. Upholding the Airmen’s Bond, Symposium held at McDermott Library, University of Texas at Dallas, on 18 April 2009.
49 Telex of 12 February 75, VP-SVND to CEO, in: UTD/CIA/B18F2.
50 Telex of 24 March 75, VP-SVND to CEO, in: UTD/CIA/B18F2.
China Airlines operated C-47 EM-4 from Saigon (V-01) to Phnom Penh (C-01) and then at the direction of customer B40B, believed to be the US Embassy. On 9 April 75, Volpar N7770B flew Saigon - Pursat (C-52) - Siem Reap Alternate (C-02A) - Samrong (C-04) and back to Saigon for the same customer. On 10 April, Volpar N9577Z flew Phnom Penh (C-01), where it remained at customer direction for several hours, until it returned to Saigon.

C) Khmer Air Force maintenance: LMAT, Air America at Phnom Penh

After all US technical support to Cambodia had ceased in 1964, maintenance was done with the help of France, or aircraft like the T-28s were sent to the Hong Kong Aircraft Engineering Company. All that changed after General Lon Nol had taken over power. The Cambodian Air Force, officially created as Aviation Royale Khmère in April 1954, was renamed as Aviation Nationale Khmère in 1970 and then as Khmer Air Force in 1971. The insignia also changed in 1970 from a roundel version of the Cambodian flag, that is a red disc with a blue circle around it and white Angkor towers inside the disc, to a more USAF-style insignia with bars and a blue disc with the Angkor towers top left and three stars on top right. US military aid arrived quickly, as the USA delivered the first shipment of spare parts for T-28s on 25 March 70. In April 70, the Royal Thai Air Force initiated covert T-28 operations in support of the Khmer Republic. But this program abruptly stopped in mid-1970, after one of the planes was downed near the banks of Tonle Sap Lake; the pilot was found executed in the cockpit. Initial US military aid arrived thru the intermediary of South Vietnam or at least via that country. Early military aid was arranged thru the US Embassy, which was always in contact with the Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, and it arrived from South Vietnam and also from Laos. In addition, President Nixon authorized the use of some $ 10,000,000 of his contingency funds for military assistance to the Khmer military prior to 1 July 1970. Beginning with fiscal year 1971, military assistance became a regular US MAP. On 31 January 1971, MEDTC (Military Equipment Delivery Team – Cambodia), was activated, a military institution that had been created by the US Government to control the flow of supplies to Phnom Penh after most of the old AVNK aircraft had been destroyed by North Vietnamese sappers in an attack to Pochentong airport on 21 January 71, but very soon, MEDTC became deeply involved in training the Cambodian military. But as there were massive protests in the United States against US military engagement in Cambodia and as several new laws limited the President’s possibilities to deploy US military in a war against foreign countries, the US administration tried to maintain a very low political profile in Cambodia. But there were also more momentous reasons for any US military aid to Cambodia to keep a low profile: In early 1971, the Cooper-Church Amendment prohibited the assignment of US advisors to the Khmer armed forces.

51 Identification of the airport codes: Cambodia Briefing Sheet of 22 August 74, in: UTD/Walker/B26F1.
52 Saigon Daily Flight Schedules for 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 28, and 29 April 75, all in: UTD/Walker/B31F6+9.
53 Grandolini/Cooper/Troung, Cambodia, part 1, p.9.
54 Grandolini/Cooper/Troung, Cambodia, part 1, pp.9+12, part 2, p.3.
55 See http://fotw.vexillum.com/flags/kh-round.htm; that site points out to the drawings that can be found in the collection of http://www.skytamer.com (formerly at …/roundels/cambodia/01.htm, …02.htm, at the moment under construction).
56 Grandolini/Cooper/Troung, Cambodia, part 1, p.10. The first material aid to the Khmer military was organized by a Special Support Group established within the Military Assistance Command Vietnam in May 1970, ranging from captured Communist and updated US weapons to aerial resupply shipments (Conboy / Bowra, The war in Cambodia, pp. 11/2).
57 Conboy / Morrison, Shadow war, p.279 note 12.
59 Grandolini/Cooper/Troung, Cambodia, part 2, p. 1.
60 Grandolini/Cooper/Troung, Cambodia, part 1, p.9.
61 Sutsakhan, The Khmer Republic at war, p.53.
Yet, the Khmer Air Force still needed maintenance training for all those new aircraft, and that was to become the task of a group of Air America maintenance people who were transferred to Phnom Penh on 1 November 71 under the innocent name of “LMAT – Logistics Management Assistance Team”. Head of the group was Ward S. Reimer (MTS/LMAT – Manager, Technical Services for LMAT), who was promoted SCR (Senior Company Representative) at Phnom Penh, effective 1 January 1972.\(^{62}\) The majority of the LMAT Team arrived on 28 October 71,\(^{63}\) but a marker in front of the new LMAT office said: “LMAT is here 1 Nov. 71”.

Ward Reimer second from the left in front of the LMAT office; the LMAT office after it had been hit by a 122MM rocket (both photos with kind permission from Ward S. Reimer)

The original LMAT team at Phnom Penh in 1971        The LMAT marker “1 Nov. 71”
(with kind permission from Ward Reimer)

Not only the US military was to keep a low profile in Cambodia, but also the Company personnel who advised the Khmer Air Force on how to service its aircraft. So at Phnom Penh, Air America’s advisory team did not work under the name of Air America – a name that had already been publicly linked to the CIA in the meantime –, but under the name LMAT, and LMAT people were explicitly requested to “maintain a low profile.”\(^{64}\) Most members of the first LMAT team were Filipino mechanics from Air America, some of whom stayed in Cambodia even after the Philippine Embassy closed and so could not get out because of

\(^{62}\) Circular “Announcement” dated 23 March 72, in the possession of Ward S. Reimer, who kindly sent it to the author.

\(^{63}\) Memorandum sent by Ward S. Reimer to the Director of maintenance, Tainan, on 3 November 71, now in the possession of Ward Reimer who kindly forwarded it to the author.

\(^{64}\) E.g. in the Phnom Penh Station Monthly Report for May 73, p.2 (in: UTD/CIA/B39F1).
expired passports, but there were also Ron McLean and Ken Himes and a Bell Technical Representative, Robert Collins, who worked with the Bell helicopter section.\textsuperscript{65} LMAT’s task is well described by Brigadier General Theodore C. Mataxis’ \textit{MEDTC - End of Tour report} submitted on 12 February 1972: “To provide an in-country KAF logistics system, capable of supplying and maintaining the Khmer aircraft, a contract was established to provide a Logistics Management Assistance Team (LMAT) to assist and train KAF personnel in supply and maintenance procedures. This team has established the basis of a simple, manual accounting, supply system with the KAF personnel now doing a large part of the requisitioning, receiving, storing, and issuing of supplies and equipment. The progress of the KAF in maintenance of aircraft has also been good and has reached the point where all organizational maintenance is being performed in-country for the O-1D, U-1A, C-47, UH-1H, T-28, T-41 aircraft except for UH-1H preventative maintenance periodic (PMP) inspections which still are performed for the most part by USARV [US Army, Vietnam]. Only those combat battle damaged aircraft and those requiring IRAN are being maintained through third-country sources and by contract.”\textsuperscript{66} So the LMAT team worked together with the head of MEDTC, Lt.Col. Doll since October 71, and with the personnel of the \textit{Khmer Air Force} of Pochentong Airbase, represented by their Chief of Staff, Col. So Satto, and the Pochentong

\begin{center}
\textit{Khmer Air Force} Col. Pon Borin, Commander of Pochentong Airbase (with kind permission from Ward S. Reimer)
\end{center}

Base Commander, Lt. Col. Chhun Peang,\textsuperscript{67} later Col. Pon Borin,\textsuperscript{68} Ward Reimer recalls: “The first liaison between MEDTC and LMAT and where we got the orders was with Lt.Col. George Doll. He provided the overall direction and controlled the dollar line. As time wore on, we provided battle reports and accomplishments of the fighter sorties. […] My administrative boss was Dave Hickler. Dave spent very little time at Phnom Penh and remained in Bangkok. The maintenance boss was my longtime boss George Stubbs in Tainan.”\textsuperscript{69} And of course, there were the \textit{Khmer Air Force} trainees at all levels:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{65} E-mail dated 31 December 2005, kindly sent to the author by Ward S. Reimer; Memorandum sent by Ward S. Reimer to the Director of maintenance, Tainan, on 3 November 71, now in the possession of Ward Reimer who kindly forwarded it to the author.
\item \textsuperscript{66} BG Theodore C. Mataxis, \textit{MEDTC - Military Equipment Delivery Team, Cambodia – End of tour report}, dated February 1972, pp. III-11/12. Mataxis had been the head of MEDTC.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Memorandum sent by Ward S. Reimer to the Director of maintenance, Tainan, on 3 November 71, now in the possession of Ward Reimer who kindly forwarded it to the author.
\item \textsuperscript{68} E-mail dated 31 December 2005, kindly sent to the author by Ward S. Reimer.
\item \textsuperscript{69} E-mail dated 31 December 2005, kindly sent to the author by Ward S. Reimer.
\end{itemize}
Ward Reimer recalls: “We did in fact try to train the Khmer as maintenance personnel. The problem was they were on guard all night without sleep, and trying to train sleeping people in the daytime failed; this problem was never solved.” And being on guard all night was necessary, as the situation at Pochentong was so dangerous “that we finally got Taipei to agree to hazardous pay. They agreed on 3.00 US $ per day. I had to submit a report on dates and times and number of hits per day,” Ward Reimer recalls: “If not, no pay.” And then there were lots of other problems even in daily routine: “The daily activities reports that were obtained and then I delivered them to the DAO (Defense Attache Office) at the Embassy were generally in note form. The briefing went on all day at various times based on sortie completion. I remember one body count interview with a Khmer pilot. When I asked him what he had done, he responded: ‘Shooting boats on the river’. I asked which side, North or South. He replied: ‘Who cares; they are all the same.’ These reports were almost certainly structured later to come out much better than things really were. The stories about that operation are almost endless: Two soldiers cooking in the bomb dump on a steel pole resting on two 500 pound bombs and a fire in between. The fire got away and the dump went up. Rockets were landing in the market downtown nine miles away. Shooting at the eclipse until all the ammo was expended, resulting in emergency airlift of ammo.”

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70 E-mail dated 31 December 2005, kindly sent to the author by Ward S. Reimer.
71 E-mail dated 31 December 2005, kindly sent to the author by Ward S. Reimer.
72 E-mail dated 4 January 2006, kindly sent to the author by Ward S. Reimer.
The documents preserved at the Air America Archives cover the 1973/74 period only, plus a couple of weeks of 1972. According to the documents for 1972, in 1972 LMAT reports to MEDTC (with copies among others to Air America’s Base Manager at Bangkok) were signed by R.J. McLean, Acting Manager Technical Services of LMAT, and in 1973, those monthly reports were signed by E. J. Griffis, Air America’s Station Manager at Phnom Penh. At least for some months of 1973, 2 types of reports per month are available at the Air America Archives, a purely technical report about the status of the Khmer Air Force sent to MEDTC, and a report about LMAT business sent to Air America officers at Bangkok, Taipei, and Tainan. From this second type of report it becomes evident that LMAT’s customers were MEDTC and the US Embassy at Phnom Penh, and that the personnel strength of LMAT was about 20 people. LMAT advisors worked together with Khmer Air Force maintenance officers; sometimes they had to complain about low KAF morale, but at the end they managed to improve it; LMAT also arranged for technical support from other Air America / Air Asia

Air America’s offer of 13 June 72, in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 18

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73 Reports available at the Air America Archives include some reports for 1972 and the Phnom Penh Station Monthly Reports between March 73 and June 1974; all this material is located in boxes UTD/CIA/B38F8 and UTD/CIA/B39F1.

74 But MEDTC also functioned as a full member of the Country Team in the American Embassy, Phnom Penh, as the Chief of MEDTC or his representative attended the daily Country Team meetings (Mataxis, MEDTC - End of tour report, p. II-1).

75 Monthly reports of March 73 and May 73, in: UTD/CIA/B39F1; the March 73 report notes: “A discussion was held this month between MEDTC and responsible authority at KAF Headquarters and KAF Chief of Maintenance to attempt to determine a practical solution to alleviate the poor operational/ready rate (O/R) of all aircraft – AC-47/C-47 in particular. It was pointed out that a prime contributing factor was the poor attendance record of KAF officers and mechanics” (p.1) And then: “This month KAF experienced a re-shuffling in their chain of command, affecting all grades. This rejuvenation had a decided affect on all personnel as definite up-lifting of morale has been noted.” (p.3) “The new regime appears more receptive to recommendations than the previous officers. It appears that the KAF are becoming more motivated than in the past.” (p.4).
facilities or from associated companies: In this way, heavy maintenance was done by Thai-
Am at Bangkok, a training program for KAF AU-24 Helio Stallions was organized at Takhli,
and later a training program for KAF O-1s and T-28s was organized at Udorn, but “the much
sought project to send 30 KAF mechanics to TNN [= Tainan] for Basic Mechanics Course
appears to have been completely scrubbed, due to political restrictions involved.” Indeed,
more than once, Air America had offered MEDTC to train Khmer Air Force aircraft
mechanics at Tainan: On 13 June 72, D. T. Massin, Director of Air America’s Maintenance
Contract Division sent an “unsolicited proposal for such training” to Lt. Col. John Harrington,
MEDT-KR, proposing among others a schedule and courses for Supervisors, Quality Control
Inspectors, and Avionics Mechanics. On 3 October 72, the same Director of Air America’s

Air America’s offer dated 3 October 72 plus the first 2 pages of “Proposals A/B”
(in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 18)

Maintenance Contract Division made a new proposal to Lt. Col. Harrington, this time for
“training of Khmer Air Force aircraft mechanics at the basic level”, this time including very

76 Monthly reports of March and May 73 (in: UTD/CIA/B39F1); quotation: May report, p.1.
77 Letter dated 13 June 72, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no. 18.
detailed “Proposals A and B”\textsuperscript{78}. But nothing came out of it. Apparently, aircraft delivered to Thai-Am at Bangkok were flown there by Air America pilots,\textsuperscript{79} but the maintenance itself was done by mechanics of or hired by the \textit{Khmer Air Force}.

The purely technical reports do list the achievements made over the years in maintaining the fleet of the \textit{Khmer Air Force}, but they also give a desperate picture of all sorts of shortages and problems KAF maintenance at Pochentong airport suffered from since the beginning. After a general introduction that mentions some of the aircraft lost during the month, the reports state by aircraft type what was accomplished during that month and what could not be done. There are special chapters about the maintenance of KAF C-47s/AC-47s, T-28s, AU-24s, U-1As, O-1A/Ds, T-41s, a summary of the situation and some ideas how to improve it. Then another series of chapters presents the types of maintenance done (sheet metal, engine, electrical, etc.), the various training programs, and general problems like insufficient supplies or warehousing. To give an idea of how the general maintenance situation deteriorated over the years in spite of the famous Air America “can do”-spirit, here are some quotations taken from those reports. In February 1972 everything still sounds quite optimistic: “The receipt of material and requisition status is increasing at a steady rate. MEDTC-LOF has apparently solved the majority of the source pipelining problems that plagued the KAF in the past. In fact, the receipt of material and status at such a rapid rate is causing some concern for the KAF in that they are unable to process documentation fast enough due to lack of personnel. The KAF are attempting to expedite the training of new personnel being assigned to KAP Supply”.\textsuperscript{80} That changed in 1973, when Capt. So Patra, a son-in-law of Prince Sihanouk, defected with his T-28 and tried to bomb the Presidential Palace: “On 17 March 1973, T-28D aircraft 807 was stolen from Pochentong Air Base by a KAF pilot who attempted to drop his bomb load on the Presidential Residence. He missed his mark and the bombs hit a barracks adjacent to the Residence, killing and wounding many persons; the whereabouts of the aircraft are unknown. Following this incident, all aircraft were grounded for a period of three (3) days”.\textsuperscript{81} In long term, that T-28 attack had tremendous

\textbf{\textit{Khmer Air Force}} T-28 “0-17807”, the aircraft that bombed the Presidential Palace on 17 March 1973, seen here at Pochentong in 1971/2
(with kind permission from Ward S. Reimer)

\textsuperscript{78} Letter dated 3 October 72 and Proposals A and B, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no. 18.
\textsuperscript{79} Grandolini/Cooper/Troung, \textit{Cambodia}, part 2.
negative effects on the KAF, as the US Congress forbade any additional involvement of the US military in Cambodia and ordered a complete pull-out of all US troops by 15 August 1973.\textsuperscript{82} This meant that the days of big US supplies coming in had come to an end. Already for June 73, Air America’s Phnom Penh Station Report notes: “Several aircraft programs are being affected by lack of test pilots or poor scheduling of available test pilots, which ever the case may be” (p.5). “Training is still in dire need of more instructors” (p.6). Among the problems are also “insufficient drill bits for sheet-metal mechanics” and “inadequate hand tools for sheet-metal mechanics” (p.8).\textsuperscript{83}

In July 73, the overall situation is unchanged: “It has been noted that lack of common hand tools is causing delays in all phases of maintenance. […] The chronic drill bit problem still exists today. Sheet-metal and machine shop mechanics are constantly delayed due lack of sufficient drill bits. […] Lack of OIC’s [= KAF Officer’s in charge] supervision and poor attendance of mechanics is probably the biggest overall maintenance problem. For all practical purposes there is no maintenance being performed from 1100 hours to 1430 hours daily; if this situation cannot be corrected the O.R. [= operational ready] rate will remain about the same.”\textsuperscript{84} In August 73, the lack of spare parts was becoming even more problematic: “The age old problem of parts shortages causing NORS/G [= non-operational ready due to supply / grounded] aircraft, and in numerous cases the parts must be cannibalized from one aircraft to others to keep the remainder of the aircraft flying; this of course costs many additional man/hours to remove and replace, and there is always the possibility of damaging a good part during removal.” But then Air America’s famous “can do”-spirit adds: “In summarizing a general improvement has been noticed however, in some areas a more aggressive plan of improvement is required.”\textsuperscript{85}

The same dual attitude also characterizes the report for June 1974: “In most areas the KAF continued to improve during the month of June. With their improvement and increase in sorties both tactical and training the increase in ‘growing pains also occurred’.”\textsuperscript{86} But in the meantime, it is no longer only the chronic lack of spare parts, adequate tools, and man power, or an occasional lack of discipline among the KAF maintenance people, but also a higher grade of deterioration of the airport itself: “As the rainy season gets into full swing the concrete aircraft parking and laterite taxiways become hazardous especially to the C-123K heavy lift aircraft, with frequent ‘bogging’ down during taxiing. It requires anywhere from two to four hours to jack up and free the aircraft, which in turn slows down much needed airlift. It is recommended that this problem receive some priority before major damage is caused to one of the heavy lift fleet. The temporary repair of the concrete and laterite taxiways when an aircraft breaks through is very slow; this is partially caused due to no equipment available to Base Civil Engineer Squadron. There have been numerous requests to responsible persons in obtaining a dump truck for the KAF, but so far no reaction. With a dump truck the repairs could be speeded up some, and other projects could also be begun and others finished such as the outside bulk storage area for supply, which will require many cubic yards of top soil to fill low areas and holes.”\textsuperscript{87}

From the very beginning, Air America’s presence in Cambodia was well hidden: Whereas their flights into Cambodia were part of contracts that originally covered activities in South Vietnam,\textsuperscript{88} Air America’s maintenance advise at Phnom Penh was part of a contract that

\textsuperscript{82} Elder, \textit{Air Operations in the Khmer Republic}, p.59; Grandolini/Cooper/Troung, \textit{Cambodia}, part 2, p.2.
\textsuperscript{88} In the same way, the person responsible for Air America’s security in Cambodia was the Security Chief at Saigon (interview with Robert L. Leonard, dated 2 June 2006).
originally covered operations in Laos. Contract no. F04606-71-C-0002 between Air America Inc. and the United States Air Force (Deputy Chief, Joint U.S. Military Advisory Group, Thailand) officially covered “Flying services and aircraft maintenance services in Thailand and Laos” for the period between 1 July 1970 and 30 June 1973.\textsuperscript{89} Although the Company had lots of maintenance contracts with the US military, some of which covered even aircraft of the RoKAF and the VNAF, as well as contracts with several airlines like Air Vietnam, there was no separate maintenance contract for Khmer Air Force aircraft.\textsuperscript{90} Instead, as the Price Negotiation Memorandum dated 20 October 1971 for contract no. F04606-71-C-0002 shows, this contract, which had originally been issued by SMAMA in June 1970, also covers “logistics management assistance (i.e., support operations for the Cambodian Air Force)”, and during Fiscal Year 1972, $199,920 of the total contract sum of $13,708,920 would be for the “Logistics Management Team” at Phnom Penh.\textsuperscript{91} Effective 1 July 1972, this contract was extended to also cover former USAID contracts 439-342 and 439-713, and that for the period of Fiscal Year 1973; and the modified version, called contract no. F04606-71-C-0002-P00054, also includes money for the “Logistics Management Assistance Team” at Phnom Penh.\textsuperscript{92} Officially, the part covering LMAT was called contract no. F04606-71-C-0002-0007, and modification no. -08 of 1 July 72 made things like APO mail service or Duty free gasoline purchase and other goods available to “U.S. citizen employees of the contractor”. Third Country Nationals were excluded from these services, although the same modification encouraged the contractor “to employ at least two (2) members of the LMAT who are fluent in French or Host Country languages” and “a Host Country national who can act as interpreter.”\textsuperscript{93}

LMAT Contract no. F04606-71-C-0002-0007, Modification no. 08, eff. 1 July 72, pp.1+2 (UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 24)

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\textsuperscript{90} Maintenance contracts, pp. D-6 to D-9, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F4.


\textsuperscript{92} Modification F04606-71-C-0002-P00054 effective 1 July 72, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F6.

\textsuperscript{93} Modification F04606-71-C-0002-0007-08 effective 1 July 72, in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 24.
On 1 June 73, the USAF Pacific asked for a new contract by Request for Proposal (RFP) no. F64620-73-R-0004. The services of this new contract were to be “a continuation of those services under Order 0007 of contract F04606-71-C-0002”, but could also include War Hazard Compensation and Reimbursement for War Hazard Losses: “With the provisions of War Hazard Losses clause, the Contractor need not purchase commercial insurance or self-insure.”

Air America reacted twice: First, they signed the solicitation for a new contract – to be called F64620-74-C-0001 – on 12 June 73, but the response of CINCPACAF is not available, as the document preserved in the microfilm only bears the signature of Air America’s Vice President Contract Affairs Var M. Green, but no signature from the USAF. This means that this contract solicitation was not accepted. At the same time, Air America proposed Modification no. 10 to the old contract, i.e. to Contract no. F04606-71-C-0002-0007 effective 1 July 73, and this document was countersigned by the USAF. Modification no. 10 to the old contract has two points of interest: a “Although the aircraft covered by this Order are not specifically set forth in the schedule of subject contract, they shall be considered to be government furnished property in accordance with the clause entitled ‘Government Property (Fixed Price)’ of the General Provisions.” This probably also means that the aircraft flown by the Khmer Air Force and maintained by LMAT were property of the US Air Force. The other point of interest is the “Work Specification for Call Order Specialists”, i.e. Appendix B to Modification no.10, because they clearly speak of Khmer Air Force aircraft, adding that new specialists to be hired had to know “U.S. Military Supply and Maintenance procedures”

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96 Modification F04606-71-C-0002-0007-10 effective 1 July 73, Item 7 of Block 12, p.3, in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 24.
and had to work together also with LMAT and MEDTC personnel.\textsuperscript{97}

Since late 1973, Air America assisted the \textit{Khmer Air Force} even in a very direct way, sending down some of their own Twin Otters to be used by Cambodian Forward Air Controllers. Former Twin Otter pilot Jim Pearson recalls: “Later in the war, in December 1973, the customer deployed our Twin Otters with long range tanks, 650 gallons of internal fuel giving us a total of over 1000 gallons. This could keep the Otter aloft in excess of 10 hours. We would fill up at Pakse and proceed to Phnom Penh, Cambodia with four interpreters onboard. On reaching Phnom Penh, we would climb to 20,000 feet and follow the orders of the interpreters. They would listen on enemy frequencies and then call in air strikes directly. We would usually work around Phnom Penh, then up to Battambang and around Siem Reap, then back to the Prey Veng area, and when finished proceed to Pakse and fuel up for Udorn, Thailand.”\textsuperscript{98}

Probably those Twin Otter flights contributed to the fact that, in spite of all the problems mentioned above, the KAF was really successful in 1974. This was in part possible because its new commander, Brigadier Ea Chhong, introduced very high standards of leadership and command. By September 1974, the KAF was flying more then ever, with T-28s mounting 127 combat sorties a day on average. But on 4 October 74, Col. E.E. Johnson, Chief of MEDTC’s Air Force Division, wrote to Brig. Gen. Ea Chhong, Chief of Staff of the Khmer Air Force, that there was “an alarming increase in the accident rate for the past two months. […] Two of these accidents were the result of maintenance malpractices in which checklist procedures were violated. The remaining nine accidents resulted from pilot error […] – the same lack of professionalism on the part of the KAF aircrew members. […] KAF must take immediate action to eliminate these deficiencies through a comprehensive training program […]. We can no longer afford the continued loss of valuable aircraft and the needless expenditure of

\textsuperscript{97} Modification F04606-71-C-0002-0007-10 effective 1 July 73, Appendix B, in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 24.

\textsuperscript{98} E-mail dated 5 September 2005, kindly sent to the author by Jim Pearson.
maintenance resources, to repair aircraft damage resulting from substandard performances of KAF personnel. […] I am confident that you share my concern in this matter and will take the necessary action to insure the efficient utilization of KAF assets.”

The results of this letter are unknown. But also in October 74, the USA decided to stop supporting General Lon Nol by limiting the worth of ammunition the Cambodians were allowed to spend per day to $82,000. On 31 December 1974, the contract to advise the Khmer Air Force that Air America had had under the name of LMAT ran out – probably another effect of the same politics. Former LMAT head Ward S. Reimer recalls: “The LMAT contract was shed by the Company. The word that we were closing down had been put out for those having inside info. Sig Larsson VP [= Vice-President] Contracts advised me a year or so early that all things were to close. The LMAT thing was given to Sig to dispose of and Bisson formed this new personal company to take it over.” But LMAT reemerged as LMAT Inc. under the presidency of Gary Bisson of Washington DC, and on 1 January 1975, E.J. Griffis, the former director of Air America’s LMAT, also became the new director of LMAT Inc.; even the office at the US Embassy remained the same, c/o MEDTC. “The problem was the KR [= Khmer Rouge] had other ideas and it lasted only a short time.”

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100 Grandolini/Cooper/Troung, Cambodia, part 2, pp. 6-7.
102 E-mail dated 1 January 2006, kindly sent to the author by Ward Reimer.
103 Robbins, Air America, p. 264.
104 E-mail dated 1 January 2006, kindly sent to the author by Ward Reimer.