I) At the times of CAT

Since early 1951, a CAT C-47, mostly flown by James B. McGovern, was permanently based at Saigon\(^1\) to transport supplies within Vietnam for the US Special Technical and Economic Mission, and during the early fifties, American military and economic assistance to Indochina even increased. “In the fall of 1951, CAT did obtain a contract to fly in support of the Economic Aid Mission in FIC [= French Indochina]. McGovern was assigned to this duty from September 1951 to April 1953. He flew a C-47 (B-813 in the beginning) throughout FIC: Saigon, Hanoi, Phnom Penh, Vientiane, Nhatrang, Haiphong, etc., averaging about 75 hours a month. This was almost entirely overt flying.”\(^2\) CAT’s next operations in Vietnam were *Squaw I* and *Squaw II*, the missions flown out of Hanoi in support of the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu in 1953/4, using USAF C-119s painted in the colors of the French Air Force; but they are described in the file “Working in Remote Countries: CAT in New Zealand, Thailand-Burma, French Indochina, Guatemala, and Indonesia”. Between mid-May and mid-August 54, the CAT C-119s continued dropping supplies to isolated French outposts and landed loads throughout Vietnam. When the Communists incited riots throughout the country, CAT flew ammunition and other supplies from Hanoi to Saigon, and brought in tear gas from Okinawa in August.\(^3\) Between 12 and 14 June 54, CAT captain Fred Walker flew some 39,000 pounds of mortar shells to Seno in southern Laos, but then returned to air-dropping food, parachutes, barbed wire, and fencepost.\(^4\) But when the last CAT C-119s and C-46s had left Vietnam by the end of 1954, only a single CAT aircraft remained in the country: a C-47 attached to the USOM office at Saigon.\(^5\)

\(^{1}\) On 31 August 51, the CAT C-47 based at Saigon was B-811 (Memorandum dated 11 September 51 sent by the President to the Board of Directors, in: UTD/Leary/B20F9).

\(^{2}\) “CAT in French Indochina”, p.4, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1. For more details, see my file *Working in remote countries* within this e-book.


Yet another type of contract work was done immediately after the Geneva Agreement of 21 July 1954. As the agreement permitted free movement of civilians for a certain time, a mass exodus began from the North to the South. Chinese officials immediately chartered 2 CAT C-46s to evacuate Nationalist supporters from Hanoi to Saigon for a month. On 22 August 54, Project Cognac began, in which, for two months until 4 October, at first 12 CAT C-46s, and, due to French competition, 7 CAT C-46s since 18 September, transported people from North Vietnam to the South. “An interesting aspect of Cognac was the association with [Col. Edward] Lansdale’s Saigon Military Mission (CIA). As Lansdale later reported: ‘CAT asked SMM for help in obtaining a French contract for the refugee airlift, and got it. In return, CAT provided SMM with the means for a secret air travel between North and Saigon.’ [...] Major Lucien [...] Conein was responsible for developing a paramilitary organization in the north, to be in position when the Vietminh took over. Conein had MAAG cover, moved north as part of MAAG staff working on refugee problem. The team had headquarters in Hanoi, with a branch at Haiphong. Among its cover duties, the team supervised the refugee flow for the Hanoi airlift operated by CAT.”

So CAT’s return flights to the North were often used to smuggle north agents of the CIA’s Saigon Military Mission and weapons to be used for causing trouble to the new Communist regime – over eight tons. Especially in January 1955, CAT C-46s flew supplies, arms and equipment to Haiphong, where they were hidden inside building foundations or buried on cemeteries during phony funeral ceremonies. Other supplies, including 14 radios, 300 carbines, 50 pistols, and 300 pounds of explosives, were flown north in February and March 55 and hidden in caches along the Red River. “The northern group was involved in a number of ‘dirty tricks’ operations, including the sabotage of busses and the railroad. They also identified targets for future paramilitary operations. However, the mission generally was a failure, with little success in leaving an effective stay-behind network.”

Confronted with a Viet Minh that was fiercely determined to take over power, these agents left the north together with the last French troops on 9 October 54. Some of the arms caches were discovered only in 1964. In January 1958, Dale Williamson replaced Al Pope in Saigon. Clyde Bauer was Station Manager at Saigon. Flying was an average of 120 hours a month, point-to-point for the USAID mission, with Chinese co-pilot and radio operator. On Tuesdays, there was a scheduled flight from Saigon to Phnom Penh, Bangkok, Vientiane, and Bangkok, returning the next day.

In June 58, Saigon Station was requested that a second C-47 be stationed at Saigon that was to fly for Johns, Drake and Piper and for Capital Construction.

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6 “August 17, 1954 saw the signing of a new contract (dubbed ‘Operation Cognac’) in Saigon between the French and CAT. [...] Six C-46s arrived in Saigon on August 22rd and another six followed shortly thereafter in one of the largest exodus from a Communist regime. CAT operations were centered at Hanoi with maintenance at Hanoi. [...] The center of operations was later transferred from Hanoi to Haiphong on September 19th and remained there until the operation came to an end on Oct. 4th” (“Operation Cognac”, in: CAT Bulletin, vol. VII, no. 10, October 1954, pp. 28/9).


8 Robbins, Air America, p.153.

9 Conboy / Andradé, Spies and commandos, pp.9/10.


11 Leary, Perilous missions, pp.192/3.

12 Dale D. Williamson, interview made by William M. Leary at Bellevue, WA, on 13 July 1987; Professor Leary’s notes are preserved at UTD/Leary/B43F5.

13 Letter dated 18 June 58, President Grundy to Vice Chairman of the Board, CEO Doole, online readable at: http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1818029/195802.pdf
II) The 1959-1964 period:

As to the American involvement in South Vietnam during the early sixties, since 1961, Air America had very close relations with a South Vietnamese company called VIAT, a cover for the CIA,\(^{14}\) which it helped to build up – as will be described later. Probably due to the fact that President Diem did not want to have an official presence of US troops in South Vietnam,\(^{15}\) the official presence of Air America aircraft in South Vietnam was still very limited during the early sixties: In 1961, there was only contract no. 61-02 with USOM / Saigon, dated 20 June 61, which called for one Piper Apache.\(^{16}\) By 1963, Air America’s presence in South Vietnam had grown a little bit. Initially, aircraft that were normally based in Laos or Thailand would come to South Vietnam for a short period, that is TDY. One of the pilots involved was Joe Hazen. He recalls: “On/about 5 January 1963, Fred Walker, Ed Dearborn and I, as captains, Leroy Letendre and Howard (Howie) Carroll as co-pilots, went from Vientiane to Danang to check-out several strips for future Air America operations. I don’t recall who designated the airport abbreviations, but Danang was F-16.\(^{17}\) I think Khe Sanh was K-2 (not F-2). There was also F-12, F-22, F-24, F-25, F-28, F-84 and F-87. Saigon and Pleiku did not have designations or abbreviations. The other places we went to were Dalat, Ban Me Thuot, Kontum, Qui Nhon, possibly Cam Ranh Bay, Nha Trang and a few others.\(^{18}\) […] On 18 January, all of us went to BKK on [Caribou] 853 as it was in need of service that was not yet available in Vietnam. Don Coney took my place when the aircraft went back to Vietnam. I stayed in BKK and then flew [Caribou] 851 to Vientiane on 23 January. – The next time I went back to Vietnam is when I took N4224G (DO-28) from BKK to SGN (F-17) on 3 February 1963 and stayed until 16 February.\(^{19}\) On the 16th, I was a passenger on an Air Vietnam Caravelle SGN/BKK. While operating the DO-28 for two weeks, I went to F-1, F-3, F-4, F-7, F-11, F-16, F-20, and F-22. Places with no designations were Camau, Plei Mrong, Cheo Reo, Ham Tan, Rach Gia and An Loc.”\(^{20}\)

In July 1963, the following Air America aircraft were assigned to operations in Vietnam:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Aircraft</th>
<th>Base</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>DHC-4A</td>
<td>B-853</td>
<td>Danang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>523</td>
<td>Apache</td>
<td>N-327F</td>
<td>Saigon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>523</td>
<td>Apache</td>
<td>N-327F</td>
<td>Saigon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AAM Aircraft Availability of 1 July 63, in: UTD/Walker/B25F8

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\(^{14}\) Fax dated 7 August 2000 by Brigadier General Aderholt to the author.

\(^{15}\) Prouty, *JFK. The CIA, Vietnam, and the plot to assassinate John F. Kennedy*, p.208.

\(^{16}\) Contract list as of 27 July 62, that is Memorandum no. ALC-62-134, in: UTD/Fink/B2F16.

\(^{17}\) Interestingly, in the distribution list of Memo no. DFC-63-147 of 28 November 63 (in: UTD/Walker/B7F6), which also touched Danang-based aircraft, there was also a SZF16 (Station Manager Danang) and a CMF16 (Chief Mechanic Danang).

\(^{18}\) Among the things carried were supplies for CIA people working at Khe Sanh (Telephone interview given to the author by Joe Hazen on 13 October 2007).

\(^{19}\) During that period, Joe Hazen carried people for USAID (Telephone interview given to the author by Joe Hazen on 13 October 2007).

\(^{20}\) E-mail dated 4 October 2007, kindly sent to the author by Joe Hazen.
The biggest contract Air America had for operations in South Vietnam was contract no. DA-92-321-FEC-1861 with the US Army’s Composite Service Group (CSG). Aircraft assigned to this contract were based at Danang and Saigon. At Danang, they had one big aircraft: From at least 1 July 63 to 13 September 63, this was Caribou B-853, which was replaced by C-47 B-829 that day, as the Caribou was transferred to Bangkok. Beech Ten-Two N7950C was to be added on 17 August 63, but only arrived on 6 or 7 October 63. The Saigon-based fleet assigned to the CSG-contract began with Do-28 N4224G, then Ten-Two N137L was added on 8 June 63, followed by Apache N3277P on 12 July 63. The old USOM contract 61-002 still used Saigon-based Apache N3277P until 6 July 63, when it was replaced by Ten-Two N9521Z. Between at least 7 July 63 and 21 September 63, Do-28 N2001F was the only Air America aircraft assigned to contract AID-430-523 for use out of Saigon, but between 1 and 26 September 63, this aircraft was at Tainan for maintenance, without any interim replacement indicated. So, apparently there wasn’t much business.

Former Danang Station Manager Hank Schiller describes the situation that existed in late 1963: “In 1963 AAM had a station, and a single plane operation, in Danang. I was the Captain / Station Manager from September 1963 until March 1964 with C-47, B-829. Paul Quackenbush was the SFO, followed by Ben Franklin, possibly a brief interim Chinese FO. Y.C. Wong was the Flight Radio Operator, and AFS’s were Henri Verbrugghen and David Ersland. The mechanics were Joe Rejante (?), from the Philippines, and a Vietnamese, Hanh. Major “Clancy” provided our local marching orders, and the FRO (Flight Radio Operator) communicated at fixed times with Taipei and Vientiane using Morse code. During that time Special Forces teams were assigned to the CIA, and we provided their primary means of support. Numerous trips to Khe Shan, Kham Duc, Ashau, Aloui, and other areas of Central Vietnam, were flown. Very few airdrops, almost all supplies were delivered by landings. We also provided support to Navy Seal Teams assigned to the CIA. In early 1964 the Special Forces and Seal Teams were returned to military control and our primary task was assumed by the Air Force. I, and B-829, were transferred to Saigon. I was preceded by about four or six months at Danang by Tony Durizzi, with a Caribou. Tony was the first Danang Captain / Station Manager. Prior to Tony Durizzi, I think an AAM Caribou spent some TDY time flying out of Danang, possibly Ed Dearborn or Don Coney. Also, Saigon was an AAM Station from 1963 or 1964. Clyde Bauer was the AAM Station Manager, as well as the CAT Station Manager. George Taylor was there with an Apache.” As to Air America’s Apaches, their main task of seems to have been communication flights and to transport small goods to outlying villages, mostly under USAID-contracts. But although USAID was officially the main contractor to Air America in South Vietnam, all CIA missions in South Vietnam were flown as part of the USAID contracts, and within those contracts, all CIA requirements were handled with priority. Former Air America pilot George Taylor recalls his flights in Air America’s Apache in South Vietnam: “The majority of flights out of Saigon was either for the Embassy or USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and was used mostly to fly passengers and light cargo (mostly medical supplies) around the country. I did on occasion fly Mr. William Colby, who at that time was CIA Station Chief, to some of the

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22 AAM Aircraft Availability for 1 July 63, 15 July 63, and 21 September 63, all in: UTD/Walker/B25F8.
25 This is confirmed by John “Woody” Spence who, in 1963, was the CIA air operations officer at Danang on the project to supply Special Forces camps by Air America (John “Woody” Spence, Interview, conducted by Prof. Bill Leary at Tucson AZ on 21 August 93, formerly in: UTD/Leary/B21F7, now in: UTD/Leary/B37F9 or 10).
27 Harnage, A thousand faces, pp. 81/2.
strips in Vietnam and on the Vietnam / Laos border and at times some of his people,” and “the military in the Embassy would often get to use it when needed”.  

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

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

By February 1964, the Apache of USOM contract 61-02 had been replaced by Beech Ten-Two N9521Z, which had entered service on 9 July 63. At that time, additional Air America aircraft were assigned to 3 new contracts: USAID-Vietnam contract no. AID-430-523 called for Do-28 N2001F effective 15 March 63. Former Do-28 pilot Joe Hazen recalls: “In South

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28 E-mail dated 8 May 2005, kindly sent to the author by George Taylor.
29 E-mail dated 22 May 2005, kindly sent to the author by George Taylor.
30 Letter dated 8 August 63 sent by Lester J. Gottlieb of USOM Saigon to Phan Huu Vinh, Director of Civil Aviation, Saigon, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.6.
31 Letter dated 8 August 63 sent by Lester J. Gottlieb of USOM Saigon to Phan Huu Vinh, Director of Civil Aviation, Saigon, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.6.
Vietnam, I carried only passengers and their personal baggage. Usually I carried Americans working for USAID and CIA field agents working with the Montagnard and others.”

The US Army’s Composite Service Group in South Vietnam (CSG) had contract DA-92-321-FEC-1861 with Air America and called for C-47 B-829 at Danang, and for Ten-Twos N137L and N7950C, Apache N3277P, as well as Helio B-861 at Saigon in support of their Special Forces, as described above. Ten-Two N7950C was assigned to the Composite Service Group contract no. DA92-321-PBC-1861 and positioned Bangkok-Saigon on 24 January 64 for 90 days; but already on 31 March 64, it was released and remained at Saigon unassigned. Since 14 December 63, Beech Ten-Two N6622C had been assigned to Saigon to fly under USAF contract AF(531)-1757 that Air America had with ARPA, the Department of Defense’s Advanced Research Projects Agency, to support defoliant and communications research – leaving Apache N3183P, which had returned from Phnom Penh on 7 January 64, still unassigned. In those early days, the status of Air America was not quite clear to everybody:

Air America Do-28A N2001F at Chon-Thanh, a rubber plantation near Saigon, in March or April 1963, taken by Joe Hazen (with kind permission from Joe Hazen)

Apparently, Air Vietnam considered the company to be a competitor, and so in August 63, flight clearances were denied to Ten Twos N137L (assigned to contract 1861) and N9521Z (assigned to contract 61-02). Reacting to this situation, Lester J. Gottlieb, Executive Officer of USOM Saigon, in his letter dated 8 August 63, points out to Phan Huu Vinh, Director of Civil Aviation, Saigon, that “the uses to which the USOM puts these aircraft are not commercial. Rather they are quite special and for the purpose of providing the logistic support for the joint USOM-Government of Vietnam projects, of direct interest to the counter-

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32 E-mail dated 1 May 2005, kindly sent to the author by Joe Hazen.
33 Air America aircraft availability of 1 February 64, in the possession of Ward Reimer who kindly faxed it to the author on 17 February 2004; Operations Circular of 1 April 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B8F4-
34 See the Minutes of Meetings of Executive Committees of Air Asia Co Ltd and Air America Inc. of 11 August 64, in: UTD/CIA/B7F3.
35 Operations Circular no. CA-C-OF-64-002 of 3 February 64, kindly faxed to the author on 17 February 64 by Ward Reimer.
36 E-mail dated 23 September 2008, kindly sent to the author by Joe Hazen.
37 Memorandum for file, dated 9 August 63 written by the assistant to the Station Manager of Saigon, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.6.
insurgency program, and public safety program and other programs which require special support. [...] We are, as you know, engaged in a program designed to assist the economy of your country. As such we are interested in the development and success of Vietnam’s commercial airline. We intend to cooperate fully with Air Vietnam and have, in fact, interceded with the United States Information Agency in order to attempt to arrange a charter from Air Vietnam that will be mutually satisfactory.” After this long declaration, Gottlieb asked clearances for the 2 Ten Twos.\(^{38}\)

![Ten-Two N9521Z at Saigon on 8 July 63](image)

(UTD/Kirkpatrick, slide A 5417)

On 1 April 64, the overall situation of Air America in South Vietnam was still very much the same – with the exception that C-47 B-829, Ten-Two N7950C, and Apache N3277P had been released from contract 1861 with the US Army’s CSG on 31 March 64 and were now unassigned.\(^{39}\) And again, Air America’s status in South Vietnam was questioned by the Director of Civil Aviation, Saigon, to whom on 21 April 64, Charles E. Anderson sent the

![Air America C-47 B-829 at Saigon in the mid-sixties, taken by Ward S. Reimer](image)

(with kind permission from Ward Reimer)

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\(^{38}\) Letter dated 8 August 63, sent by Lester J. Gottlieb of USOM Saigon to the DCA, Saigon, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.6. \\

\(^{39}\) Operations Circular no. CA-C-OF-64-013 of 1 April 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B8F4.
following declaration: “The Government of the United States of America has specific airlift requirements in the Republic of Vietnam in connection with its various programs, (which in turn are in support of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam); in this connection, Air America Incorporated was selected as the most suited firm to carry out the airlift support requirements. Air America Incorporated is in Vietnam solely for the purpose of supporting the requirements of the Government of the United States of America; the firm thus would not engage in any other activities except with the specific authorisation of the Government of Vietnam and with the concurrence of the Government of the United States of America.”

Letter dated 21 April 64 to Mr. Phan Huu Vinh, Director of Civil Aviation, Saigon (in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no. 6)

In July 64, USAID-Vietnam contract no. AID-430-523 still called for Do-28 N2001F, and USOM contract no. 61-02 still called for Ten-Two N9521Z, but the USAF and the US Army had increased the number of Air America aircraft they wanted to use: ARPA now used 2 Ten Twos (N6622C and N7950C, which had replaced formerly Bangkok-based Do-28 N2002F)

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40 Letter dated 21 April 64, sent by Charles E. Anderson to the DCA, Saigon, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.6.
out of Saigon under contract AF(531)-1757, and the Army’s CSG (contract DA-92-321-FEC-1861) still had Ten Two N137L assigned, but frequently called for 2 unassigned aircraft out of Saigon, that is for C-47 B-829 and Apache N3277P. Finally, Air America had a new contract with USAID Vietnam for “call” aircraft, that is AID-430-675, probably effective 1 July 64, and Ten Two N7951C and Apache N3183P were assigned to this contract. The Saigon Daily Flight schedule of 17 July 64 has survived and gives the following picture:

Saigon Daily Flight Schedule for 17 July 1964
(in: UTD/Walker/B8F7)

41 Contract AID-430-675 did not yet exist in April 64 (Operations Circular no. CA-C-OF-64-013 dated 1 April 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B8F4), but is mentioned as a new contract on 28 July 64 (Minutes of Meetings of the Executive Committees of Air Asia Co Ltd and Air America Inc. of 28.7.64, in: UTD/CIA/B7F3).
42 “Aircraft Status” as of 7 July 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1.
On 17 July 64, the old USOM contract 61-002 still required two flights of Ten-Two N9521Z, that day Saigon-Phan Rang (V-28)-Saigon and Saigon-Quan Loi (V-147)-Saigon. The old USAID contract AID-430-523 still called for Do-28 N2001F, which had 3 flights that day: Saigon-Tra Vinh (V-52)-Can Tho (V-17)-Tra Vinh (V-52)-Bac Lieu (V-58)-Tra Vinh (V-52)-Can Tho (V-17)-Ben Tre-Saigon; Saigon-Baotrai-Saigon; and Saigon-Bac Lieu (V-58)-Tra Vinh (V-52)-Can Tho (V-17)-Saigon, all of them in the Mekong Delta. The ARPA requirement (contract 1757) was reduced to one Ten-Two (N7950C) flight Saigon-Nha Trang (V-07)-Saigon, and for the Army (CSG contract no. DA-92-321-FEC-1861), Air America flew Ten-Two N137L Saigon-Ban Me Thuot military (V-12)-Nha Trang (V-07)-Saigon and Saigon-Ban Me Thuot civil (V-86)-Saigon and Apache N3277P Saigon-Vi Thanh (V-225)-Saigon that day. What was slightly expanding, was contract AID-430-675: Under this new USAID contract, Air America flew C-47 B-829 Saigon-Quang Ngai (V-23)-Saigon to Region I, Ten-Two N7951C Saigon-Camau-Saigon to the southernmost province; and Apache N3183P on 3 flights: Saigon-Nui Bara-Phuoc Vinh (V-50)-Saigon; Saigon-Vung Tau (V-05)-Saigon; and Saigon-Phuoc Vinh (V-50)-Ha Tan (V-68)-Saigon, all of them to the neighborhood of Saigon or to the Montagnards. To sum up, in the early sixties, the visible presence of Air America in South Vietnam was still quite limited, while it has to be assumed that quite a lot of work was done behind the scene by VIAT, the South Vietnamese cover for the CIA, which was supported by Air America.43

Yet, since 1961, there was still a more secret side of Air America’s operations in South Vietnam that was linked to that very same company called VIAT or Vietnamese Air Transport. Indeed, Air America’s contract 61-119 with VIAT was for call-type personnel services in South East Asia including Air America’s flight, ground, supply and maintenance

43 For VIAT, see the C-123, C-46, and Helio Courier files of “The aircraft of Air America”.
personnel, as may be called by VIAT.\textsuperscript{44} VIAT or Vietnamese Air Transport had been created by the CIA in the spring of 1961, in order to insert agents into North Vietnam, using a single unmarked C-47, that is former Air America C-47 B-809. The official Vietnamese name of VIAT was “Biet Kich So Bac - Nha Ky Thuat” or “Special Branch - Strategic Technical Directorate”\textsuperscript{45} Already on 9 March 61, President Kennedy had urged the CIA and the Department of Defense to launch guerrilla operations into Viet Minh territory. So, some twenty Vietnamese aviators, pilots of the 1\textsuperscript{st} Transport Squadron of the South Vietnamese Air Force led by Major Nguyen Cao Ky, were trained by Air America pilot Al Judkins and Air America navigator Jim Keck to fly extremely long missions at treetop level at night to precise drop zones. In chapter 5 of his memoirs, former Air America navigator Jim Keck recalls that the entire operation was run by the South Vietnamese (p.2). As the ICC, whose members came from Poland, Canada, and India, watched all US moves in South Vietnam, Al Judkins and Jim Keck officially were newspaper reporters. They used several South Vietnamese Air Force C-47s for training four complete crews, each consisting of two pilots, a navigator, a radio operator, and two kickers (p.8). These C-47s did not have radar nor large tail insignia (p.18).\textsuperscript{46} It is believed that VIAT’s B-809 was also the “unmarked Douglas C-47” that dropped South Vietnamese commando teams near Attopeu in Southern Laos in August 61.\textsuperscript{47} As to North Vietnam, on 27 May 61, a team of four agents, code-named “Castor”, was flown from Saigon to Danang, where the C-47 was refueled, and was then dropped in Ninh Binh Province in central North Vietnam. On 2 June 61, the same VIAT C-47 B-809 was used to drop a second team, code-named “Echo” into the hills north of Trooc in North Vietnam’s Quang Binh Province. And on 16 June 61, the C-47 piloted by Major Ky dropped team “Dido” in Lai Chau Province, after having dispersed leaflets near the Tinh Tuc tin mine in Cao Bang Province. But on its forth mission, VIAT C-47 B-809 was shot down in Ninh Binh Province on 1 July 61.\textsuperscript{48} Probably already beginning in 1961, VIAT received more aircraft – 2 C-46s, then 2 C-123s,\textsuperscript{49} and finally, one after another, a total of 3 C-54s.\textsuperscript{50} VIAT also had a fleet of 6 Helio Couriers.\textsuperscript{51} While the C-123s and the C-54s were used for dropping and restocking agents in North Vietnam, the Helios and probably also the C-46s were used in sensitive areas in South Vietnam. This probably included airborne training of South Vietnamese commandos of Project Typhoon for operations in Southern Laos as well as infiltrating them into enemy country.\textsuperscript{52}

In South Vietnam, since late 1961, US Army Special Forces teams worked together with a group of people called the “Montagnards”, sometimes also called “Mountainyards” or simply “Yards”. These Montagnards were hill tribes living in the central highlands of South Vietnam. Unlike the Hmong in Laos, who were mainly supplied by Air America planes, the Montagnards were supplied by the US military, with whom they worked together. Since late 1961, US Army Special Forces teams worked with the Montagnards as local organizers and instructors, and their camps were supplied initially by USAF C-47s of the “Farm Gate”

\textsuperscript{44} “List of Air America’s contracts”, Memorandum of 27 July 62, in: UTD/Fink/B2F16.
\textsuperscript{46} The manuscript of these memoirs was kindly supplied to the author by Jim Keck.
\textsuperscript{47} Conboy / Morrison, Early covert action on to the Ho Chi Minh Trail, p.4.
\textsuperscript{48} Conboy / Andradé, Spies and commandos, pp.33-41 and 317, note 2.
\textsuperscript{49} The Republic of China Air Force had received 5 C-123Bs in 1962, but only 2 of them flew in South Vietnam. Training for the C-123s was done on Taiwan under the supervision of Air America pilots. Air America had contract no. N-(713)55-169-12-64 with the Naval Auxiliary Communication Center of Taipei for C-123 instruction (Aircraft status as of 7 July 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1).
\textsuperscript{50} See the C-46, C-123, and C-54 files of this database.
\textsuperscript{51} See the Helio file of this database.
\textsuperscript{52} Conboy / Morrison, Early covert action on to the Ho Chi Minh Trail, p.3.
operation and later by USAF C-123Bs. The idea was to give the Montagnards weapons to fight the communists crossing the area, and so the CIDG (Civilian Irregular Defense Group) project began in late 61. Twelve-man Special Forces teams (known as “A-teams”) went to selected villages and won the cooperation of the tribesmen by providing medical care and weapons and by starting civic improvement projects. At each camp, local CIDG forces were recruited, equipped and trained for self-defense. In December 61 or early 1962, the CIDG program came under the control of the Combined Studies Division (CSD), a CIA operational agency reporting to the US Ambassador at Saigon. “Air shipment originated either at the division’s supply depot in Saigon or from a forward supply facility established at Da Nang. The division controlled its own small air transport force, primarily composed of civilian contract aircraft. The Farm Gate C-47s and occasionally the Mule Train C-123s supplemented the non-military transports for shipments out of Saigon.” These “contract aircraft” are believed to have been the Air America C-47 mentioned above, but also VIAT’s C-46s, Helios, and maybe also C-123s mentioned above. As the CIA’s Combined Studies Division also established border surveillance sites that were responsible for screening and reconnoitring the Laotian and Cambodian border areas, a task that was assigned to the CIDGs in late 1963, it is believed that VIAT’s Helios also served for that purpose.

When, beginning in mid-1963, the US military slowly pushed VIAT out of business, some of their Helios were leased to Air America for service in Laos, and in January 64, VIAT’s C-123Bs were transferred to MACV-SOG, that is Military Assistance Command Vietnam – Special Operations Group, renamed Studies and Observations Group in the second half of 1964. VIAT’s last C-54 returned to the Republic of China Air Force in June 63, and probably in 1964, VIAT’s 2 C-46s returned to China Airlines. After VIAT’s remaining Helios had been disposed of, the door to South Vietnam was open for Air America.

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53 Bowers, Tactical airlift, p.149.
54 Bowers, Tactical airlift, p.150.
55 Bowers, Tactical airlift, p.164.
56 Bowers, Tactical airlift, p.151.
57 Helios “531” and “530” – see the Helio file of this database.
58 Conboy / Andradé, Spies and Commandos, pp.92/3 and 296 note 9.
59 Conboy / Andradé, Spies and Commandos, p.59; e-mail dated 5 April 2004, kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu.
III) The 1964-69 period:

1) Flying conditions in South Vietnam, 1964-1969:

Contrary to its secret role in Laos, Air America’s operations in South Vietnam were nearly always quite conspicuous. Here, the Company even acted as a real airline, operating regular scheduled passenger runs from one South Vietnamese city to another. One of them was the “Da Nang rocket”, a C-46 that left Saigon in the morning, flew directly to Danang, and flew back at midday; for safety reasons, the pilots normally flew over the South China Sea along the coastline. There were also some scheduled flights that did not depart Saigon, but other Vietnamese cities: In September 67, for example, there were scheduled PC-6 flights between Danang (V-03) and Quang Ngai (V-23) in Region I.60 In March 68, there was a scheduled PC-6 flight between Can Tho (V-17) and Go-Cong (V-203) in Region IV.61 Also in March 68, there were scheduled C-47 cargo flights between Saigon (V-01) and Gia Nghia (V-202) in Region II.62 In April 68, there were scheduled PC-6 passenger flights from Danang (V-03) and Hoi An (V-206) in Region I.63 Although flying in South Vietnam was much safer than it was in Laos, some places were bad for landing: Some strips like Go Cong (V-203) were narrow, landing on the beach always meant the danger of being stuck in the sand,64 and at air strips covered with PSP (Pierced Steel Plates) like Vung Tau (V-05) the tires could be damaged or even the props.65 Another dangerous strip was Gia Nghia (V-202), a 2,000-foot

Air America C-47 “607” at Gia Nghia after its crash on 22 March 68
(UTD/Hickler/B32)

61 On 22 March 68, PC-6C N152L experienced powerplant failure “while on a routine scheduled flight between Go-Cong to Can Tho” (Accident report, in: UTD/Hickler/B24F7.
62 On 22 March 68, C-47 “607” had a landing accident at Gia Nghia after departing “Tan Son Nhut airport, Saigon on a scheduled cargo flight to Gia Nghia” (Accident report, in: UTD/Hickler/B24F2).
63 On 21 April 68, PC-6C N394R had an inflight powerplant failure while “on a scheduled USAID passenger flight from Danang to Hoi An” (Accident report, in: UTD/Hickler/B24F2).
64 On 18 April 75, a Volpar made an emergency landing on the beach near Phan Rang (Robbins, Air America, p. 283).
65 A photo showing C-123s on the PSP strip at Vung Tau can be found at http://www.vvaa.org.au/image07.htm.
66 Interview given to the author by Frank Bonansinga on 2 March 2007. On 4 January 67, for example, Air America C-45 N9592Z taxied over a piece of PSP at Truc Giang (V-14), damaging both propeller tips (XOXO of 4 January 67, in: UTD/Hickler/B26F16, XX67, l-7).
long dirt strip built on a 2,000-foot high mountaintop with a 300-foot vertical drop at either end of the strip and a slight hump in the middle, where pilots would occasionally meet strong down drafts on approach.67 Indeed, on 22 March 68, the brakes of C-47 “607” failed, and the aircraft veered off the runway and rolled down a steep embankment to the right of the extreme end of the runway at Gia Nghia.68

In later years, the big air bases like Tan Son Nhut were so crowded with military aircraft that there was little space and Air America planes sometimes hit other aircraft while taxiing. This happened, for example, to Air America C-47 B-829, which had a taxi accident at Saigon (V-01) on 5 January 67, or to C-46 B-926 on 29 July 67, when it taxied into C-47 “147” on the Air America ramp at Tan Son Nhut (V-01), or to C-46 B-928 on 20 December 67, when it taxied into Air America C-47 “559”, which was parked at Tan Son Nhut (V-01) – to mention just a few examples.69 But some bad places for landing were really dangerous. So, at Quang Ngai (V-23), enemy sharpshooters were regularly hidden at the west end of the runway. Under such circumstances, the pilots could only sit helplessly in their cockpits and watch the tracers come, and more than one Air America aircraft was hit, while sitting on the ground at Quang Ngai: So, on 16 March 66, Caribou N539Y took several hits there; on 1 December 66, it was Beech C-45 N9157Z; on 11 June 67, it was C-47 B-827; or on 29 April 69, it was China Airlines C-46 CA-1 operating for Air America, to mention only a few examples.70 Other airports were regularly under mortar attack; one of these places was Can Tho (V-17), where many Air America aircraft were damaged or even destroyed overnight while they were parked on the ramp. One of the most disastrous night attacks onto Can Tho occurred in the early morning of 21 December 67, when no less than 5 Air America aircraft were severely damaged: Helio XW-PBS, Porters N12235, N391R, and N185K, and Beech C-45 N7951C, of which Porter N12235 and C-45 N7951C were even completely destroyed.71 And up to the early seventies, Can Tho continued to be the target of many nightly mortar or rocket attacks. Sometimes, remote landing strips were held by friendly troops on one side and by the Viet Cong on the other side. This usually meant a difficult approach to the strip, and taking off from under the load: In such cases, the rear cargo door was opened when the aircraft was on the ground, the straps securing the pallets, which were on rails, were undone, but the brakes were held until the engines ran at full power. Then, suddenly, the brakes were released and the aircraft jumped forward so that the cargo pallets on their rails rolled out of the rear door.72 And occasionally, there was also aircraft hijacking: Robbins reports the story of an irate soldier who forced the crew of an Air America helicopter to take him with them by pointing his M-16 gun at them.73

And sometimes, danger could be in everyday routine: Robbins mentions a pilot who, having landed on a small strip with woods on either side, was taxiing to a standstill, when Viet Cong ran out of the trees and began firing at him. In that particular case, the pilot could taxi the aircraft to the other end of the runway, inspect the damage and take off again.74 Some areas were especially dangerous, for example the Cuchi area close to Saigon that in the meantime is famous for the tunnel system that the Viet Cong had carved there into the soil: As

70 XOXOs referring to these accidents: N539Y on 16 March 66 in: UTD/Hickler/B26F16; N9157Z on 1 December 66 in: UTD/Hickler/B26F16; B-827 on 11 June 67 in: UTD/Hickler/B26F16; CA-1 on 29 April 69 in: UTD/Hickler/B26F18.
73 Robbins, *Air America*, p.162.
this tunnel system housed important parts of their commando structure, Air America aircraft that came too close would be shot down. This happened to Air America C-45 N9574Z, which was destroyed during landing at Bao Trai, South Vietnam, on 27 September 65, killing Captain John L. Oyer, First Officer Justin G. Mahony, and passenger Jack Wells, as Bàu Trai is an area west of Cu Chi (V-207), “while performing under Contract AID-430-1092”.

Although there were wild speculations among Air America people as to what happened to that aircraft, official Company papers state that Captain Oyer was killed as a result of the injuries sustained in the accident and indicate “unfriendly action resulting in aircraft flying into the ground” as cause of the crash. Indeed, Frank Bonansinga, who flew in C-45 N9573Z that day, noted in his log book that he heard the radio call of the crew of N9574Z who said that they had been hit. So in spite of all speculations, Frank Bonansinga’s entry is his log book thus confirms the official version of hostile fire.

2) Contract flying, 1964-1969:

As has been shown above, up to the mid-sixties, Air America only operated a handful of small Apaches, Beech C-45s and Do-28s on some USOM and later USAID contracts, while two Beech 18s were used for the Department of Defense’s Advanced Research Projects Agency to support defoliant and communications research, and 1 more Beech 18 flew for the CSG, i.e. the US Army Composite Service Group in South Vietnam, moving around military advisers and the CIA. As former Air America pilot and Assistant Station Manager Les Strouse notes: “There were no rice drops that I know of. Some food was delivered to airstrips, but in nowhere near the proportions of the food support in Laos. We did carry ‘hard rice’ regularly. We did very few air drops in Vietnam.” So mass transportation of food and medicine supplies was not flown by Air America, but possibly by VIAT, a CIA cover company backed by Air America and probably also involved in the CIA-financed support programs of the South Vietnamese government. But after the death of President Diem in November 63, his programs like the “Strategic Hamlets” faded away, and so, in February 65, the whole former Saigon properties of VIAT and its holding company AII (Aviation Investors Inc., Saigon) were bought by Air America.

In the summer of 1964, communist activities accelerated, and after the Gulf of Tonkin incident, a Joint Resolution in Congress, passed on 7 August 64, gave the President blanket authority “to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.” As the number of US military aircraft based in South Vietnam was augmented since August 64, by the end of the year, Air

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75 Revised status of aircraft as of 1 November 65, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1.
76 Robbins (Air America, pp.162/3) mentions a C-45 that crashed on its final approach into Cuchi, when flying a senior embassy officer thought to be a CIA man as its sole passenger. After the crash, lots of bullet holes were found, but all from inside the plane: “Company secrecy over the incident was so tight that no one ever really knew what happened. AA personnel understood that the passenger had shot the crew and then died himself in the crash. There were conjectures among the men ranging from the charitable view that the customer’s automatic weapon had accidentally gone off, killing the pilots, to wilder assertions that a psychotic CIA man had gone berserk”. Apparently, this referred to C-45 N9574Z, but it can be proved that those speculations were nonsense.
79 Checked by the author on 10 March 2004 from an entry in the log book of Frank Bonansinga.
80 E-mail dated 10 February 2014 kindly sent to the author by Les Strouse.
81 Aviation Investors Inc. also had an office at 910 17th Street NW., Washington DC, which acted as a sales agent for the Helio Corp.: So, Helio msn 564 was sold by the Helio Corp. to Aviation Investors Inc, Washington DC, on 11 June 62, and by them to Air America on 21 June 62 (Status of 28 March 74, in: UTD/CIA/B56F4).
82 In February 65, Air America bought the Saigon properties of Aviation Investors Inc. and VIAT for $ 193,000 (Minutes of Meetings of Executive Committees of Air Asia Co Ltd and Air America Inc. of 6 April 1965, in: UTD/CIA/B7F4).
America’s Saigon-based fleet also began to mushroom. While the Air America aircraft based at Saigon on 7 July 1964 had comprised only one C-47, four Beech Ten Twos, one Do-28 and two Piper Apaches, on 1 November 65, the Air America fleet based at Saigon comprised no less than 51 aircraft: 5 Curtiss C-46s, 3 Douglas C-47s, 2 DHC-4 Caribous, 23 Beech 18s, 2 Helio Couriers, 2 Piper Apaches, 3 Dornier Do-28s, 6 Pilatus PC-6s, and 5 Bell 204Bs. Some months later, on 5 May 66, there were even 7 C-46s, 2 C-47s (with 5 more to follow in late May and June 66), 2 Caribous, 22 Beech 18s, 2 Apaches, 3 Do-28s, 7 PC-6s, and 7 Bell 204Bs of Air America based at Saigon, that is a total of 52 aircraft with 5 more to follow. The old contracts did no longer exist. Two new contracts dominated the scene, one with USAID (no. AID-430-1092) and the other one (no. AF49(604)-4395) with the USAF’s Logistical Support Group (LSG), which is believed to have been a cover for the CIA. It is known that the creation of contract no. AF49(604)-4395 was quite a long process: Already in August 63, Air America was “in the process of developing a contract” with USAF’s Logistical Support Group (PROV) for fixed wing flying in Southeast Asia. On 31 March 64, “the Air America Executive Committee discussed and authorized the management to enter into contact with the USAF Logistical Support Group for the provision of aircraft and personnel services in Southeast Asia”. As the original contract is not available, it is unknown when exactly this contract became effective. But as Government contracts are mostly linked to the Fiscal Year, which always begins on 1 July the year before, and as the situation in South Vietnam was well known to the US Government when the first US troops arrived in South Vietnam in March 65, the contract probably already existed at that time. This makes believe that it was probably effective 1 July 64.

At the time when the first US troops landed in South Vietnam in March 1965, there were two threats for South Vietnam: the Communist main forces and a constant guerrilla presence in rural areas. To fight these two threats, two types of war were necessary: a big-unit war against the main forces, and a counterinsurgency or “pacification” program against the guerrillas. At least in the 1965-68 period, battlefield realities forced the US military to concentrate on fighting the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese main forces that numbered almost 230,000 at that time. So the burden of pacification rested mainly on the shoulders of several civilian agencies, of which the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the CIA, the US Information Service, and the US Department of State were the most

84 “Aircraft status” as of 7 July 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1.
85 “Revised Status of Aircraft” as of 1 November 65, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1.
87 In his letter dated 22 January 65 to the DFC (in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.6), Treasurer Controller Amos Hiatt complains about “the amount of work and the length of time devoted to the creation of the referenced contract”, which was an “on-going contract” that at that time had only “been drafted”.
88 A handwritten note formerly preserved at UTD/Leary/I B24F7 and referring to “The Vietnam-Cambodia Emergency 1975,” Hearings – Special subcommittee on investigations, Committee on International Relations, HR 94/2. Jan. 27, 1976, confirms that the LSG served as cover for the CIA in contract no. F49604-70-C-0023, that is in the follow-on contract to no. AF49(604)-4395. Both contracts are preserved at UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 21, and according to both contracts, the “services to be performed” for the LSG are very similar. Interestingly, when the remaining CEECO or CIA B-26s were to be ferried from Tainan to the Congo by SAT pilots in August 64, it was the USAF’s Logistical Support Group (LSG) who was forthcoming as the owner of those CIA aircraft, and the delivery contract was an Air Force contract (no. AF49(604)-4194) concluded between Southern Air Transport and the LSG (see Memorandum no. DFO-64-444 of 17 August 1964, at: http://www.air-america.net/images/SAT/sat-b26a.jpg ). Apparently, the LSG was another cover used for CIA activities.
89 Minutes of Meetings of the Executive Committees of Air Asia Co Ltd and Air America Inc, dated 27 August 63, in: UTD/CIA/B7F2.
90 Minutes of Meetings of the Executive Committees of Air Asia Co Ltd and Air America Inc, dated 31 March 64, in: UTD/CIA/B7F3.
important. The idea was that it was necessary to win the hearts and minds of the people and that only strong programs of economic, social, and political improvement would guarantee a long-term pacification. Development Program teams, comprising over 30,000 persons in late 1966, were trained to introduce health, education, and construction programs at the “rice root” level. The only way to haul personnel, supplies like cement, tin sheets, or roofing material, and equipment even to the smallest village in South Vietnam was air transportation, as roads and railroads were to follow only later. This was the main task of Air America in South Vietnam. In late 1965, Air America’s “monthly lift capacities was 1,650 tons supplemented by another one hundred tons lifted monthly for AID by Air Force transports.” Evidently, all of these activities were covered by the Air America aircraft assigned to contract no. AID-430-1092.

An Air America C-45 taking off from La Vang airfield (V-263) near Quang Tri in August 67 (with kind permission from the photographer, David Sciacchitano)

But there was also another side of the pacification program, that is the side that aimed at finding and eliminating Communists that had infiltrated South Vietnam. This was the task of the CIA. Although the name of the CIA is mainly linked to the notorious “Phoenix” program created in 1967, the “Phoenix” program was not the first of its kind in South Vietnam, and then there were also other activities, in which the Agency was involved. As early as 1964, the CIA used Counter Terror Teams (CTT) to seek out and destroy Communist cadre hiding in villages. In the spring of 1966, three forerunners of the “Phoenix” program existed in South Vietnam: 1) The Hamlet Informant Program (HIP), in which principal agents working for the CIA and for the Police Special Branch recruited informants in the hamlets. 2) The Province Interrogation Program (PIC). In 1964, the CIA hired Pacific Architects and Engineers to build an interrogation facility in each of South Vietnam’s 44 provinces in 1964. Information from defectors and captured documents was put into the PIC Program reporting system, to which the CIA had total access. 3) “Penetrations into the Viet Cong Infrastructure” [...] were the

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92 Robbins, *Air America*, p.156.
94 Andrade / Willbanks, “CORDS / Phoenix”, p.18.
95 In South Vietnam, almost every village in had a cell made up of a Communist Party secretary, a finance and supply unit, and other sections to gain recruits from among the civilian population. This Communist shadow government exercised the real power thru economic and physical threats, intimidating the legitimate government
most sought-after means of gathering information. [Nelson] Brickham [that is the creator of the “Phoenix” program] conducted penetrations unilaterally and in liaison with the Special Branch. CIA province officers trained their counterpart Special Branch officers on how to mount penetrations, how to interrogate suspects, and how to recruit informants.”

In addition to gathering intelligence about the Viet Cong, the CIA also ran a number of paramilitary programs. “As Chief of Field Operations, Brickham established six regional offices and put a CIA liaison officer in each of South Vietnam’s 44 provinces. CIA Station Chief John Hart liked this organizational scheme so much that he decided to put a CIA Covert Action paramilitary officer in each province, too. The CIA’s Covert Action program under Tom Donohue had a $28-million budget, while Brickham’s liaison budget amounted to a paltry $1 million a year. Many Covert Action officers were refugees from the Bay of Pigs fiasco. They ran the CIA’s Armed Propaganda Teams […], Census Grievance Program, Montagnard program, and most importantly, the Counter-Terror (CT) Teams.”

In his memories, former CIA man Rudy Enders explains how Census Grievance (CG), Revolutionary Development Cadre (RDC) and the Counter-Terror (CT) programs functioned in 1966: “In short, CG was an intelligence gathering mechanism covered under a census umbrella. Each hamlet in South Vietnam was to have a Vietnamese CG officer. […] The CG officer was to interview any individual in the hamlet to determine, where he or she lived, where he or she lived with, and if he or she had any grievances or recommendations that should be brought to the attention of the Government. In return, the individual was expected to be loyal and report any known Communist activity, sympathizers, or VC living in the area.”

The RDC program, founded by Major Le Xuan Mai, “started as forty-man armed People’s Action Teams (PAT) which would enter a given hamlet and provide sufficient security to help the local people live in peace and improve their way of life by building wells, dams, roadways, homes, and other projects. The teams would hold entertainment shows and give instructions on how best to protect the hamlet. Subsequently, team strength was increased to 59 men, named Revolutionary Development Cadre (RDC) teams. Hence, in return for such assistance, the local population was to assist self-defense projects and provide RD team’s exploitable VC intelligence.”

Due to some unauthorized atrocities committed by Counter-terror teams (CT) in 1965/66, “CTs were renamed Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU’s), a political correct and acceptable identity. In reality, PRU’s were nothing more than highly trained SWAT teams which collected intelligence primarily from family members.”

While gathering intelligence about the Viet Cong probably did not much involve Air America aircraft, maybe with the exception of transporting agents, those paramilitary actions probably did. Some paramilitary actions had a defensive character: “In 1964, as part of the effort to combine police, intelligence and paramilitary programs, the CIA formed paramilitary reaction forces in seven key districts surrounding Saigon. The CIA provided supplies and training, while military intelligence and Special Forces provided personnel. Lists of defectors, criminals, and other potential recruits, as well as targets, came from Special Branch files.”

Others could include even small scale raids. In his book Tiger men, Barry Petersen describes his experience as a CIA man working with the Montagnard in the early years of the war:

of a village (Vikraken, “The role of the Provincial Reconnaissance Units in the Phoenix Program of the Vietnam War”, p.1).


“Petersen had been sent to Vietnam in 1963 as a member of the 30-strong Australian Army Training Team Vietnam, having previously put in a stint in counter-insurgency operations in then Malaya. After his arrival in Saigon, where foreign military contingents were officially still ‘advisers’ in the early stages of the war, he was surprised to find that the Australian team leader had arranged that he was to work under the CIA. […] Petersen’s American masters were the CIA’s Covert Action Branch, located in a small villa near central Saigon. […] After months of getting to know the area [of Dak Lac near Ban Me Thuot] and a bunch of politicking, Petersen went on to take over the command of the paramilitary group that did exist, a hundred or so Montagnard who had been under the control of the director of police for the Central Highlands region. […] With money from the Americans, Petersen started recruiting and arming up his force with CIA-acquired equipment that had passed into obsolescence in America. Viet Cong activity was increasing in the strategic highlands and Petersen was eventually to command a force of more than a thousand men. The objectives of his Truong Soc Force, (the official Vietnamese name) or the Tiger Men (the unofficial Viet Cong name) were, to begin with, the dissemination of anti-Communist propaganda and the collection of intelligence. Under Petersen, the goals went on to include ‘the disruption of Viet Cong activities, ambushes, small scale raids, and the kidnapping or assassination of Viet Cong agents and officials’.”

As has been seen above, the Montagnards or hill tribes of central South Vietnam had been supplied first by the USAF, then by VIAT, then again by USAF C-47s and C-123s operating out of Nha Trang, in 1963 joined by US Army Caribous. While many of those aircraft made air drops, a byproduct of the CIDG program was an improved net of forward airfields, and Montagnards in isolated regions were encouraged to improve airstrips by hand labor to get access to the Caribou services. Nevertheless, the CIA had its own Montagnard program for paramilitary operations, and this program was probably supplied by Air America aircraft assigned to the AF49(604)-4395 contract – as probably were all other activities of the same type that the CIA had mounted in South Vietnam: Some sources, for example, speak about “the CIA’s Rural Development cadre”. In his Memoirs, former CIA man Rudy Enders describes, how in 1966, PRU forces led by CIA men like him marched to villages that had been overrun by Viet Cong forces: “As we reached the hamlet, the VC took us under VC fire. Unfortunately, a PRU was hit in the head and died minutes later. After thirty minutes, we were able to link up with those who stood and fought in the market place building.” A little bit later, Enders built a new PRU camp and a firing range south of Bien Hoa Air Base. The location “enabled me to employ new PRU recruits immediately in building the camp: My demands on the logistics officers in Saigon were staggering. Every submitted requisition was over ten pages long, yet every demand was met. No question about it, as CIA officers we were provided the best support in the world.” As trucks were scarce, this makes believe that at least part of the material – weapons, clothing, perhaps some construction material – were flown in by Air America, whose Porters also served the CIA men leading the PRU units for intelligence flights. Often, the CIA man in the field “had control of the only civilian Air America helicopter flights.” In South Vietnam, the CIA used Air America PC-6 Porters or Bell 204B helicopters to transport CIA

103 Bowers, Tactical airlift, pp.152-64.
104 Bowers, Tactical airlift, p.405; Robbins, Air America, pp.155/6; mentions an Air America Caribou carrying a Montagnard leader and his staff from his exile in Cambodia to the Ban Me Thuot area.
105 Andrade / Willbanks, “CORDS / Phoenix”, p. 15.
personnel, \(^{110}\) including small groups of PRU, \(^{111}\) even including a motorcycle \(^{112}\) or to drop PRU paratroopers, \(^{113}\) for coordinating PRU movements from the air, \(^{114}\) visiting and re-supplying besieged outposts \(^{115}\) or PRU camps, \(^{116}\) carrying suspects to Interrogation Centers, \(^{117}\) or for coordinating mass evacuations via loudspeakers or by dropping leaflets, \(^{118}\) and still other Air America flights for the CIA were liaison flights \(^{119}\) or evacuation flights. \(^{120}\)

In the early seventies, CIA men in the field often used US military helicopters as command posts during PRU activities, as did Rudy Enders during the battle for An Loc in April-May 1972 \(^{121}\)

Air America C-46 B-926 at Saigon in the mid-sixties
(with kind permission from Ward S. Reimer)

In November 65, both contracts – AID-430-1092 and AF49(604)-4395 – received about the same number of aircraft: Nineteen aircraft were assigned to contract no. AID-430-1092: three C-46s (B-146, B-926, and B-928), two C-47s (B-829 and B-929, here still given as N4732S, expected to arrive at Saigon on 1 December 65), eleven Beech 18s (Ten Twos N9573Z and N9521Z, Hybrid N9577Z, and C-45s N7695C, N9157Z, N6154U, N9855Z, N9475Z, N9956Z [at Tainan at that time], plus N9898Z as well as N9592Z both en route), one Apache (N3183P), and two Do-28s (N2001F and XW-PBU). Twenty-one aircraft were assigned to contract no. AF49(604)-4395: one C-46 (B-156), one C-47 (B-879), two DHC-4s (N539Y, and N544Y expected to arrive in November 65), nine Beech 18s (Ten Twos N137L, N6622C, and N7950C, as well as C-45s N7770B, N9671C, N9838Z, N9073Z, N4933C, and


N3674G), two Helios (B-875 and B-877), and 6 PC-6s (N185K, N184L, N9445, N12450, N748N, and N193X expected in November 65). Seven aircraft were assigned to other contracts that Air America had with the USAF: Contract no. AF49(604)-4242 called for one Apache (N3277P) and 5 Bell 204Bs (N8511F, N8512F, N8513F, N8514F, and N8535F) and contract no. AF62(531)-1845 called for Do-28 N2002F at Saigon, but also for several Air America aircraft that were based at Bangkok. Finally, one C-46 (B-858) and three C-45s (N9664C, N9871C, and N9518Z) were spare aircraft.\footnote{122} This large number of STOL aircraft was needed in order to gain access to rural hamlet areas, where new landing strips were built.

In April and May 66, the overall situation was quite similar, but Air America’s Saigon-based fleet included a number of additional aircraft: Two C-46s (B-138 and B-910) had been added to the AID-430-1092 contract; C-47 B-817 had been substituted for the ill-fated B-929 on the same contract, but C-47 B-879 had left the AF49(604)-4395 contract for Udorn, and 5 more C-47s (“083”, “084”, “559”, “607”, and “949”) were expected to be assigned to the AID-430-1092 contract in May or June 66; C-45 N9592Z had been dropped from the AID-430-1092 contract and become a spare aircraft, together with 3 more C-45s (N9542Z, N3728G, and N5254V) that had arrived from Bangkok, while spare C-45 N9518Z had gone to Udorn; C-45s N7695U and N6154U left the AID-contract in mid-April 66 for Volpar modification. In the Porter scene, N748N had left the Air Force contract for Bangkok, while the AID-430-1092 contract had received 2 Porters (N391R and N394R); the 2 Helios had left for Udorn. All aircraft formerly assigned to USAF contract no. AF49(604)-4242 (one Apache and 5 Bell 204Bs) had been transferred to the AF49(604)-4395 contract, and contract AID-430-1092 had received 5 Bell 204Bs of its own (N1303X, N1304X, N1305X, N1306X, and N1307X).\footnote{123}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image1.png}
\caption{Two shots of Air America C-46 B-910 taken at Danang in February 1967 (with kind permission from the photographer, David Sciacchitano)}
\end{figure}

Beginning in 1963, part of Air America’s ever growing C-45 fleet was modernized: While those original Beech C-45s and most of the aircraft acquired later had a maximum take-off weight of 8,750 lb., including a useful load of 2,150 lb., which allowed them to fly 900 s. m. at 175 mph., some 12 of the C-45s were converted to “Ten-Two” in 1963 and 1964.\footnote{124} Although the engine remained the same, a P & W R-985 with 450 b.h.p., the new aircraft had...

\footnotesize\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{122} All details taken from “Revised Status of Aircraft” as of 1 November 65, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1.
\item \footnote{123} “Revised status of aircraft” as of 8 April 66, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1; “Status of aircraft” as of 4 May 66, in: UTD/Hickler/B1F2.
\item \footnote{124} A total of 7 C-45s were converted to Ten-Two in 1963, the first 2 conversions being approved in March 63 (Minutes of Meetings of the Executive Committee of Air Asia Co Ltd. of 12 March 63, in: UTD/CIA/B7F2), 3 more were approved in May 63 (Minutes of Meetings of the Executive Committee of Air Asia Co Ltd. of 14 May 63, in: UTD/CIA/B7F2), and 2 more conversions were approved in September 63 (Minutes of Meetings of the Executive Committee of Air Asia Co Ltd. of 20 September 63, in: UTD/CIA/B7F2).
\end{itemize}
a maximum take-off weight of 10,200 lb. (hence its name “Ten-Two”), including a useful load of 3,350 lb., which allowed it a range of 915 s. m. This increased performance was achieved by a power plant modification, a stabilizer incidence increase, new gear doors, and aerodynamically improved wing tips. Finally, since 1966, a total of 14 Air America Beech C-45s was converted by Air Asia, Tainan, to Volpar Turbo Beech, whose two Garrett TPE-331-

47 turbo-prop engines gave it a maximum take-off weight of 10,286 lb., including a useful load of 3,886 lb., a true air speed of 245 mph. and a range of 1,040 s. m. In their new role in South Vietnam, all three versions flew for USAID and for the US military, transporting people like CIA or Phoenix personnel, Green Berets, or members of the secret Special Operations Group and a variety of goods that ranged from typewriters or TV sets to life animals – for example baby chicks and even sedated bulls – or hand grenades. George Taylor recalls that he “did at different times fly American military personnel around to different stops in Vietnam on the C-45". It seems, however, that the Volpars were mainly used for passengers, including courier services for the US Embassy, while the older C-45s and Ten-Twos were used for cargo. All regular Volpars were equipped to carry 10 passengers and had even air conditioning, although they could also be used for air drops.

125 Air America Log, vol. II, no. 5, 1968, p. 1. Six conversions to Volpar were approved on 23 March 66 (Minutes of Meetings of the Executive Committees of Air Asia Co Ltd. And Air America Inc. of 23 March 66, in: UTD/CIA/B8F1); the first conversion to Volpar (N7695C) was completed on 15 June 66, the second (N6154U) on 25 June 66. Both aircraft arrived at Saigon after conversion on 28 July 66 (Minutes of Meetings of the Executive Committees of Air Asia Co Ltd. and Air America Inc. of 25 May 66, 15 June 66, and 3 August 66, in: UTD/CIA/B8F1).
126 Robbins, Air America, p.154.
127 Art Kenyon reports that he once flew a Twin Beech full of hand grenades (Robbins, Air America, p.156).
128 E-mail dated 18 May 2005, kindly sent to the author by George Taylor.
129 Frank Bonansinga, interview given to the author at Indio Hills, CA on 2 March 2007.
130 Aircraft and avionics information as of 1 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14.
While contract no. AF62(531)-1845, which was effective 20 August 1965, was simply a follow-on contract to no. AF(531)-1757 that Air America had had with ARPA, that is with the Department of Defense’s Advanced Research Projects Agency, to support defoliant and communications research, and called for “contract services pursuant to instructions from the Director, ARPA,”¹³¹ and while contract no. AF49(604)-4242 seems to have been only a supplement to Air America’s main contract with the LSG, that is to no. AF49(604)-4395,¹³² it is more difficult to really distinguish between the operations covered by the two principal contracts that Air America had in South Vietnam with the LSG and with USAID. In those days, Air America did not fly any covert missions in South Vietnam. Their role was to help the US military, especially by moving around military commanders (but it could also have been to deliver 15 cases of beer to a group of G.I.s working up in the mountains), to assist the US Embassy by moving around politicians, that is all kinds of personnel affiliated with US Government agencies, CIA men working in South Vietnam, or congressmen visiting from the

¹³¹ Jerry Fink, Memorandum no. DLC-67-104 dated 6 June 67 about Air America operations in Thailand, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7B.

¹³² In the “Revised status of aircraft” dated 8 April 66 (in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1), all aircraft formerly assigned to contract no. AF49(604)-4242 are assigned to no. AF49(604)-4395.
United States, and to help USAID with various kinds of construction work, that is with buildings, facilities, or airports.\footnote{Frank Bonansinga, interview given to the author at Indio Hills, CA on 2 March 2007.}

A very special construction program was that of new landing strips. Most pressure came from the Chief of Station at Saigon who wanted to implement the National Security Council Memorandum concerning provincial and district networks of CIA personnel and so urgently needed those airstrips. So, Air America’s Managing Director George Doole created a new company in June 1965 called Pacific Engineering Company (PENCO) and intended to be an engineering division of Air America. Initially, PENCO consisted only of Richard E. Fisher, former president of Airways Engineering Corporation, a company specialised in designing and supervising airport construction. From June to October 65, Fisher and his team made a survey of STOL strip sites and future needed. After this project, Fisher remained under Air America employment to meet existing and future requirements for airfield engineering, and so he supervised construction work at Saigon, Vientiane, and Udorn. As PENCO matters were handled by Washington, the company also served as a cover for CIA agents from 1971 onwards, and by 1971, no less than 139 agents worked under PENCO cover, most of them out of Vientiane.\footnote{Leary, Manuscript, ch. V, pp.130-34, in: UTD/Leary/B19F4; DD/S, Monthly Report for October/November 1965, p. 4, online at 1818029/196510.} 

![Air America C-45 N5254V at Nhon Co, accident of 31 March 66 (UTD/McCauley/B1F5)](image)

The backbone of Air America’s operation in South Vietnam was an ever-growing fleet of more than 20 Beech C-45s, Ten-Twos, and Volpar Turbo Beech aircraft, which operated both for USAID and for the US military. Flights for both contracts often had many legs: On 2 September 65, Frank Bonansinga flew Ten-Two N7950C Saigon (V-1), Vung Tau (V-5), Can Tho (V-17), Vinh Long (V-20), Moc Hoa (V-51). Mytho New-Saigon under the provisions of contract AF49(604)-4395;\footnote{Log book of Frank Bonansinga, checked by the author at Frank’s home on 10 March 2004; Aircraft status as of 1 November 65, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1.} and on 13 June 66, he flew C-45H N9871Z on a very long mission of nearly 10 hours with 20 landings, the route including stops at Long Xuyen (V-169), and then Can Tho (V-17), Soc Trang (V-16), Bac Lieu (V-58), V-175, Can Tho (V-17), Long Xuyen (V-169) and back to Saigon (V-01) in the morning and Truc Giang (V-14), then Can Tho (V-17), V-175, Can Tho (V-17), Quan Long (V-10), Can Tho (V-17), V-175 in the afternoon; at that time, N9871Z was operated under the provisions of contract AID-430-
Even C-45s that were unassigned could be used for flights that had many legs: On 22 July 65, Frank Bonansinga flew C-45G N9664C Saigon (V-01)-Vinh Long (V-20)-Can Tho (V-17)-Long Xuyen (V-169)-Rach Gia (V-56)-Camau-Bac Lieu (V-58)-Soc Trang (V-16)-Can Tho (V-17)-Saigon; at that time, this aircraft was unassigned and used at Saigon as a spare aircraft for daily calls. Some of these landings would take only a couple of minutes before taking off again; so the pilot would keep the right engine running, while the left engine was shut down. At some places like at Ban Me Thuot the aircraft was often refuelled.

Flights that were performed under contract no. AID-430-1092 included the transportation of Embassy and CIA personnel: When C-45G N9574Z was shot down and destroyed during landing at Bao Trai on 27 September 65, killing Captain John L. Oyer and First Officer Justin G. Mahony and one passenger, thought to be a senior Embassy officer and a CIA man as its sole passenger, it was performing under contract AID-430-1092. On more than one occasion, Frank Bonansinga flew John Hart, the CIA Station Chief of Saigon. On 20 September 65, during a return flight from Nha Trang to Saigon with passengers working for the Embassy on board, C-45H N6154U had anti-aircraft artillery exploding in front of the aircraft near Saigon, when piloted by Frank Bonansinga, but landed at Saigon safely; again, the aircraft was assigned to contract AID-430-1092. Frank also recalls that one morning, when he opened the door of his Beechcraft, he found that his aircraft was full of Vietnamese men wearing white habits. They were French Christian Brothers, that is priests to be flown to Danang – probably on invitation from the Embassy, because for a flight with Air America an authorization from the American Embassy was needed. They had been at Saint Paul’s church at Covington, LA, where Frank had had his education. When Frank introduced himself as someone who had gone to school at Saint Paul’s, one of them said: “We were at Saint Paul’s last summer” – what a small world. Sometimes, even flights operated right in the middle of the war in Vietnam had a very human aspect: Frank Bonansinga recalls: “The area had been infested with communist sympathizers. The VC and North Vietnamese troops were fighting the Americans and SV forces not far north of us at Dong Ha and there were reports of enemy action south and around Hue Citadel north. My passenger and I landed on a grass field next to a river by Quang Tri in an Air America VTB turboprop Beech, 95 Charlie and parked the machine. My USAID passenger was met by a village chief, like a mayor, and they departed to conduct their business. I stayed with the plane. There was no one at the small field. Then some kids came running up to the plane. I was glad to see them. None of them spoke a word of English and my Vietnamese was lacking. But kids everywhere like aeroplanes and these children were no different. So no language communication really was needed. I smiled and tried to talk with them and got the message across that they could come into the Volpar with me, but one at a time! They did and each child was taken to the cockpit and got to sit in the
left seat, the Captains seat. They were fascinated, looking at the many instruments and speaking in their language, probably saying, ‘gee whiz’, ‘look at me’ or the likes. Each ‘pilot’ took hold of the yoke and played pilot for the moment. They all got their ‘cockpit check out’ from the Ugly American. These kids could have been children of anti American VC parents. But it made no difference to them or to me. Once leaving near by Dong Ha up on the DMZ, flying low over the beach, I saw a boy shooting his rifle at me. That could have made a difference, but not today. Just as the last Vietnamese child was finished with his cockpit check out, my passenger arrived. It was fortunately he carried a camera and took the picture you see. He was kind enough to send me a copy.

“This picture shows a dozen or more happy faces at Quang Tri Riverside in Vietnam. It was taken 20 August 1966. It was a fun at the VTB 95 Charlie, for all the kids and me too!”

Many flights operated under contract AID-430-1092 were made for USAID customers: On 23 September 65, Frank Bonansinga made a very long flight at the direction of a USAID man called “James”, flying C-45G N9577Z from Saigon first south to Can Tho and then north up to Kontum, until it returned to Saigon, following the route Saigon (V-01), Can Tho (V-17), Phan Rang (V-28), Phan Thiet (V-11), Bao Loc Plantation (V-37), Dalat/Cam-Ly (V-08), Nhon Co (V-21), Ban Me Thuot City (V-86), Cheo Reo (V-27), Holloway (V-25), Kontum (V-15), Qui Nhon (V-13), Tuy Hoa North (V-19), Nha Trang (V-07), and Saigon (V-01). On 18 October 65, he used the same aircraft for the same USAID customer called “James” on a Saigon to Saigon route, making a total of 9 landings at places such as Nha Trang, Ban Me Thuot, and Kontum. And on 7 July 66, he again flew C-45G N9577Z for the same “James”, making 11 landings at places like Nha Trang (V-07), Gia Nghia (V-202) and Dalat (V-08). While “James” was the USAID man based at Nha Trang, Frank Bonansinga also flew C-45 services for a USAID man called “Naughton”: So on 5 June 66 he flew Saigon (V-01)-Nha

143 Frank Bonansinga, Autobiography, kindly given to the author by Frank himself.
Trang (V-07)-Qui Nhon (V-13)-Tuy Hoa North (V-19)-Cheo Reo (V-27)-Nha Trang (V-07)-Phan Rang (V-28)-Dalat/Cam-Ly (V-08)-Dak To2 (V-34)-Kontum (V-15)-Cheo Reo (V-27)-Nha Trang (V-07)-Phan Thi (V-11)-Nha Trang (V-07)-Saigon in Ten-Two N9521Z for that USAID customer. On 16 May 66, he had made another multi-leg flight for the same USAID customer (“Naughton”), this time using C-45G N3728G on the pattern Saigon (V-01), Cam Ranh Bay (V-192), Nha Trang (V-07), Saigon (V-01), Nha Trang (V-07), Phan Thi (V-11), Dalat/Cam-Ly (V-08), Phan Thi (V-11), Cam Ranh Bay (V-192), Nha Trang (V-07), and Tuy Hoa North (V-19) to Shan Ghia. All of these flights were made in C-45s assigned to contract no. AID-430-1092. Sometimes, aircraft assigned to contract no. AID-430-1092 even flew South Vietnamese Army people: When Air America Do-28 B-931, which is known to have been assigned to this contract in 1966, crashed into a rice paddy after take-off from My Tho (V-183), South Vietnam, on 17 November 67, there were 2 South Vietnamese Army passengers aboard.

C-45s assigned to contract AID-430-1092 were also used for courier flights. Courier runs often transported office supplies, type writers, reports, files, and other paper work between government sections. There were several C-45 courier flights going to the north, and the “Delta Courier” going to the south: The C-45 northern run could go up to Pleiku or to Qui Nhon. On 18 July 65, Frank Bonansinga flew C-45G N9577Z Saigon (V-01)-Nha Trang (V-07)-Qui Nhon (V-13) and then back again via Tuy Hoa (V-113), Nha Trang (V-07), Dalat (V-08) and Nha Trang (V-07) again to Saigon (V-01); and on 20 July 65, he flew the same aircraft Saigon (V-01), Nha Trang (V-07), and Qui Nhon (V-13) to Pleiku (V-04) and then back again via Ban Me Thuot City (V-86), Tuy Hoa (V-113), and Nha Trang (V-07) to Saigon (V-01); at that time, N9577Z was assigned to contract AID-430-1092. Sometimes, the C-45 courier flight to the north ended at Ban Me Thuot East (V-12): On 10 June 66, Frank Bonansinga flew C-45G N9521Z from Saigon (V-01) to Ban Me Thuot East (V-12) via Nha Trang (V-07), and then back to Saigon (V-01) via Dalat (V-08), Nha Trang (V-07), Phan Rang (V-28), Phan Thi (V-11), and Ham Tan (V-132); at that time, N9521Z was assigned to contract AID-430-1092. The C-45 “Delta Courier” went down to Bac Lieu (V-58): On 16 October 65, Frank Bonansinga flew C-45H N9871Z on the “Delta Courier” flight from Saigon down to Can Tho (V-17), Soc Trang (V-16) and Bac Lieu (V-58), with a total of 9 landings. On 7 May 66, he flew C-45N N9475Z on the “Delta Courier” flight from Saigon (V-01) to Bac Lieu (V-58) via Vinh Long (V-20), Long Xuyen (V-169), Can Tho (V-17), Kien Giang (V-167), and Quan Long (V-10), and then back to Saigon (V-01) via Soc Trang (V-16) and Can Tho (V-17). On 10 June 66, he flew C-45G N3728G on the “Delta Courier”, but using a slightly different pattern, that is Saigon (V-01), Vinh Long (V-20), Can Tho (V-17), Kien Giang (V-167), Long Xuyen (V-169), and Quan Long (V-10) to Bac Lieu (V-58), and then back to Saigon (V-01) via Soc Trang (V-16) and Can Tho (V-17). On 21 July 66, he flew C-45G N9898Z on the “Delta Courier” run, using still another pattern, that is Saigon (V-01),

144 Log book of Frank Bonansinga, checked on 10 March 2004 and again on 2 March 2007, when Frank commented that entry in his interview given to the author; Aircraft status as of 1 November 65, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1; Aircraft status as of 5 May 66, in: UTD/Hickler/B1F2.
145 Aircraft status as of 5 May 66, in: UTD/Hickler/B1F2.
147 Interview given to the author by Frank Bonansinga on 2 March 2007.
148 Log book of Frank Bonansinga, checked by the author at Frank’s home on 10 March 2004; Aircraft status as of 1 November 65, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1.
The Mekong Delta as seen from a small Air America plane
(with kind permission from Ed McCain)

Long Xuyen (V-169), Can Tho (V-17), and back to Saigon (V-01), then Can Tho (V-17), Quan Long (V-10), Bac Lieu (V-58), and back to Saigon (V-01) again. The aircraft used on these flights were all assigned to contract AID-430-1092. Flights into the Delta were tough to navigate, as at that time there was no radio equipment in that area, as there are no landmarks in the Delta, and as crosswinds may be quite strong.150

Later, Volpars replaced the C-45s on these Embassy Courier flights: On 30 November 66 and on 23 December 66, Frank Bonansinga flew the Embassy run out of Saigon in Volpar N91295, which lost one engine near Nha Trang (V-07) on 23 December, but landed safely.151 And on 9 December 66, he flew Volpar N7695C on the Embassy Courier run even up to Hue Citadel (V-70) in the very north of South Vietnam, using the pattern Saigon (V-01), Ban Me Thuot East (V-12), Nha Trang (V-07), and Danang (V-03) to Hue Citadel (V-70), and then back to Saigon (V-01) via Danang (V-03), Nha Trang (V-07), and Ban Me Thuot East (V-12). Since about August 66, the new Volpars replaced the old C-45s on those courier flights: Frank Bonansinga notes that he flew Volpar N7695C on courier flights on 26 August 66, 18 October 66, and 1 November 66, and Volpar N91295 on 3 November 66, 9 November 66, and on 12 January 67.152

One of Air America’s Saigon-based Volpars working for USAID153 was even specialized in VIP flights: Although on 18 October 66, Frank Bonansinga used Volpar N91284 on a courier flight with 16 landings, since November 66, he often flew this particular Volpar N91284 on VIP flights, mostly out of Saigon: On 15 November 66, he flew General Breckfield on a VIP flight and on 21 November 66 General Humphreys. On 30 November 66, Frank Bonansinga made a VIP flight from Saigon to Danang, and on 1 December 66, he made a VIP run Saigon-Hue-Danang-Saigon, always using Volpar N91284. On 10 December 66, he flew a Colonel Muncrice on a VIP flight Saigon (V-01)-Pleiku (V-04)-Ban Me Thuot East (V-12)-Nha Trang (V-07)-Saigon (V-01) in N91284; and on 1 February 67, he flew a Minister of the Republic of Vietnam on a VIP flight from Saigon (V-01) to Rach Gia (V-56)-Can Tho (V-17)-Saigon (V-01) to Moc Hoa (V-51). Finally, on 3, 7, 14, 15, and 16 February 67, Frank Bonansinga flew VIPs of USAID out of Saigon in N91284.154 But during a monsoon storm on 23 March 67, this special VIP Volpar crashed into a rain-veiled mountain north of Danang (V-03) at

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150 Log book of Frank Bonansinga commented by him to the author on 2 March 2007; Aircraft status as of 1 November 65, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1; Aircraft status as of 5 May 66, in: UTD/Hickler/B1F2.
153 When Volpar N91284 crashed in March 67, it was assigned to contract AID-430-1092 (according to the list of “Deceased employees”) or to contract AID-430-2178 (according to another list of deceased employees); both lists are preserved at: UTD/Leary/B34F1.
coordinates AU 0307 at approximately 1507 hours local time, while en route Danang–Hue, South Vietnam. The aircraft exploded and was totally destroyed, killing the pilot, Captain Bruce C. Massey and 8 passengers, including 7 prominent US educators in Vietnam on an AID project and a USAID official, including Dr. Arthur D. Pickett, Dr. Vincent F. Conroy, Dr. Bangsberg and Dr. Albertson.  

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Beech C-45s that were assigned to the contracts that Air America had with the USAF, sometimes also transported South Vietnamese military personnel: When C-45H N9933Z crashed ½ mile north of Tan Son Nhat Airport after take-off from Saigon on 5 July 65, it was operated under contract AF49(604)-4242, and among the victims was not only Air America pilot Alexander Scandalis, but also 2 Vietnamese passengers. On 9 May 66, Frank Bonansinga flew General Truang from Saigon (V-01) to Danang (V-03), and Tuy Hoa North (V-19), and back to Saigon (V-01), using C-45G N137L assigned to contract no. AF49(604)-4395, and on 14 May 66 he flew General Trang from Saigon (V-01) to Danang (V-03) and back to Saigon (V-01), using C-45H N6622C, assigned to the same contract. Sometimes, VIP flights operated under the provisions of contract AF49(604)-4395 could radiate from another airport than Saigon: On 21 May 66, Frank Bonansinga flew C-45H N6622C from Saigon (V-155

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155 XOXOs of 23 to 31 March 67, in: UTD/Hickler/B26F16; Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Directors of Air America Inc of 16 May 67, in: UTD/CIA/B3F5; Minutes of Meetings of the Executive Committees of Air Asia Co Ltd and Air America Inc. of 28 March 67, 23 May 67, 13 June 67, and 12 December 67, in: UTD/CIA/B8F2; Board of Review report, in: UTD/CIA/B34F2; Memorial file, in: UTD/LaShomb/B16F3; List “Aircraft destroyed or lost”, in: UTD/CIA/B49F2.  

156 Aircraft status as of 1 November 65, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1.  

01) to Pleiku (V-04) and on to Kontum (V-15), then back to Pleiku (V-04), on to Ban Me Thuot East (V-12), again back to Pleiku (V-04), again northward to Kontum (V-15), and from there back to Saigon (V-01) via Ban Me Thuot (V-12) – apparently carrying a Pleiku-based person visiting other posts. And those C-45s also flew to US Army Special Forces Camps:

The remains of C-45H N9933Z near Saigon in July 65
(with kind permission from Ward S. Reimer)

For example, on 25 July 65, Frank Bonansinga flew C-45G N4933C, which at that time was assigned to contract AF49(604)-4395, Saigon (V-01), Bai Trai-Tay Ninh (V-151), V-133, Nhon Co (V-21), and Bao Loc Plantation (V-37).\textsuperscript{158} Bac Loc was a Montagnard village and the location of a US Army Special Forces camp.\textsuperscript{159} On 19 May 66, he flew the same aircraft from Saigon (V-01) via Ham Tan (V-132) to Bao Loc Plantation (V-37), and then Dalat/Cam-Ly (V-08), Nha Trang (V-07) and back to Saigon (V-01).

C-45 flights that were operated for the AF49(604)-4395 customer often went up to Hue in the very north of South Vietnam: On 23 July 65, Frank Bonansinga flew Ten-Two N7950C from Saigon (V-01) to Vung Tau (V-05), then Ban Me Thuot (V-12), Pleiku (V-04), Danang (V-03) to Hue (V-06); only the following day, he came back on the route Hue (V-06), Hue Citadel (V-70), Nha Trang (V-07), Bien Hoa (V-02) to Saigon (V-01). On 3 May 66, he flew the same aircraft Saigon (V-01), Nha Trang (V-07), Danang (V-03) to Hue Citadel (V-70), and then back Danang (V-03), Ban Me Thuot (V-12), Dalat/Cam-Ly (V-08), to Saigon (V-01). And on 15 May 66 he flew C-45H N6622C Saigon (V-01) direct to Hue Citadel (V-70), and then back to Saigon (V-01) via Quang Ngai (V-23) and Danang (V-03).\textsuperscript{160} Other typical destinations of flights made for the AF49(604)-4395 customer were Vung Tau (V-05), location of a very important harbor and of a hospital, and Bien Hoa (V-02), location of a big USAF base. Frank Bonansinga flew to Vung Tau (V-05) for example on 6 May 66, using C-45G N4933C, and on 30 May 66, using C-45H N6622C. Finally, C-45s assigned to contract AF49(604)-4395 sometimes operated out of another, temporary base for about a week. For

\textsuperscript{158} Log book of Frank Bonansinga, checked by the author at Frank’s home on 10 March 2004 and on 2 March 2007; Aircraft status as of 1 November 65, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1; “Status of Aircraft” as of 4 May 66, in: UTD/Hickler/B1F2.


\textsuperscript{160} Log book of Frank Bonansinga, checked by the author at Frank’s home on 2 March 2007.
example, on 23 May 66, Frank Bonansinga flew C-45G N9838Z from Saigon (V-01) via Quang Ngai (V-23) to Danang (V-03). From 24 to 28 May 66 he flew that aircraft out of Danang (V-03), shuttling between Danang (V-03) and Hue Citadel (V-70) on 26 May or between Danang (V-03) and Quang Ngai (V-23) on 27 May 66; other locations served during those days included Pleiku (V-04) and Tam Ky (V-40). On 28 May, he first went up to Hue Citadel (V-70), then down to Saigon (V-01) via Danang (V-03), and then back to Danang (V-03) again via Nha Trang (V-07) and Quang Ngai (V-23). And on 24 May he made even 3 flights out of Danang (V-03), first to Hue Citadel (V-70) and back, then to Quang Ngai (V-23) and Pleiku (V-04) and back, and at the end to Quang Ngai (V-23) and Tam Ky (V-40), before returning to Danang (V-03). On 29 May 66, he flew C-45G N9838Z back to Saigon (V-01).

Sometimes, flights operated under the provision of contract no. AF49(604)-4395 were courier flights, for example into the Mekong delta: On 16 September 68, Volpar N7695C flew a courier service Saigon (V-01)-Can Tho (V-17)-Vi Thanh (V-225)-Ca Mau (V-10) for that contract and had a landing accident at V-10.

The Porters operating in South Vietnam flew for both customers, that is for USAID and for the USAF’s Logistical Support Group. On 19 and 20 September 1966, Air America’s Robert Dawson ferried Porter N152L from Udorn via Nha Trang to Saigon. During the following weeks, he mostly flew Porter N192X for the LSG and Porter N394R for USAID. Like the Beechcraft flights, the Porter flights had many legs: On 13 October 66, Dawson flew 10 legs in N192X, and on 15 October, he flew 14 legs in N394R. Between 1 and 6 November 66, Dawson flew Porter N192X out of Can Tho, and even some flights out of Can Tho had no less than 11 legs. On 18 November 66, Dawson flew Porter N9444 on a flight out of Saigon that had even 18 legs, and on 11 January 67, he flew the same Porter N9444 Saigon-Bien Hoa, and then more 17 legs. Later in January 67, Dawson flew PC-6 N152L in the Pleiku area, while he was temporarily based at Ban Me Thuot, and there too, for 30 January 67, he notes a 16 legs flight. In February and March 67, Dawson flew some missions that had even 20 legs – on 22 February in N9444 and on 20 March in N192X: Both flights departed Saigon and then headed south. There were also some Helios that flew under USAID contract AID-430-1092 in the 1966/67 period – in part operating out of Air America’s outside stations: In November 66, Air America’s Robert L. Wofford flew Helio B-869 out of Saigon into Region 4 under the 1092 contract; in November and December 66, he then flew Helio B-865 out of Nha Trang into Region 3 as directed; in January 67, he flew Helio B-839 out of Nha Trang into Region 3 as directed, and then in January and February 67, he flew Helio B-865 out of Can Tho into Region 4 as directed – all that under the provisions of contract no. AID-430-1092. Probably all of these Porter and Helio missions were similar to those flown in the C-45s, that is transporting all types of advisors and light cargo.

The overall picture was more complex, however: In accordance to the USAID contract, Air America aircraft carried all sorts of cargo and equipment, from food and medicine to type-writers or mail; those Air America aircraft involved in USAID construction programs hauled cement, tin sheets, roofing material and even telephone poles; sometimes, USAID agricultural programs also made it necessary to carry stinking baby chicken or even sedated bulls, and the frontispiece of Air America Log vol. VI no.1 of early 1972 shows Bell 204B N8513F carrying a donkey in a sling. These supplies were carried to the big airports by C-46s or C-47s, and from there, they were moved into the smaller hamlets by small planes or helicopters. From 1965 to December 1966, John Deakin worked as an Air America C-46 Captain in Saigon. He recalls those flights as follows: “The C-46s in Vietnam served several major tasks, and many

161 Log book of Frank Bonansinga, checked by the author at Frank’s home on 2 March 2007.
minor ones. One was picking up supplies in the port cities and large airports (Saigon and Danang mostly), and flying them to Hue, Qui Nhon, Quang Ngai, Ban Me Thuot, Kontum, Pleiku, Dalat, and many others. These supplies were food, medical supplies, clothing, animals for food and breeding stock, concrete and perforated steel planking (PSP) for airport runways and ramps. One common food was bulgur wheat, a very nutritious food. But the indigenous people wouldn’t eat the stuff, would rather starve to death, so most of that was wasted, or fed to animals. Another common mission was to evacuate villagers from one area, and relocate them to another. The press of the day made a huge deal of this, crying about the mean old USA uprooting folks from their homes, but the reality was that those folks were fighting to get on the airplanes, and more than once we had to resort to violence to stem the human tide fighting their way up the ladder. The C-46 was usually fitted to haul about 40 people in a normal passenger configuration in the USA, but all of us had well over 100, in real panic evacuations. Most of the evacuees knew they wouldn’t survive the night if they didn’t get out.

All the up-country strips were considered ‘hot’, and we had several standard techniques to minimize the risk of friendly and enemy fire. Friendly? Sure, many of the kids carrying guns were straight out of the jungle, and had NO idea what those things were that were flying around, and it was great sport to shoot at them. There were often US Army Special Forces A Teams at these airports, and more than once one of them would meet the airplane and apologize for the friendly fire. We would arrive at 3,000 feet agl over the strips (which were almost always 3,600 feet long, and 3,600 feet above sea level, 100 degrees, and often wet from recent rain) and spiral down in very tight turns with about 45 degrees bank, just a few knots above the stall. Time it just right on a very close, tight base and final, and plop the airplane in the first 50 feet of the runway, fully stalled, three point, and often slip and slide right to the end of the runway. With a nice dry runway, and good braking, the C-46 would stop in about 1,200 feet, but we didn’t get those very often, with morning dew, or tropical rain in the afternoons. Very hot asphalt can be pretty slickery, too! Takeoff almost always involved a steep turn right at liftoff, and a tight circle while gaining altitude to about 3,000 feet before proceeding on course. A few didn’t believe in doing that, and some of them didn’t survive. The grand old C-46 took all that in stride, and treated me very well. With no weather reporting, few navaids (the airplanes had ADF, but there were very few ground stations), and no brains, we cheerfully flew through any type of weather, including the big wet thunderstorms so common there. Since the C-46 is not pressurized, and has many leaky cockpit windows, there was usually more rain inside than out, and ponchos draped over the
crew and the console were normal. By my final C-46 flight on December 6, 1966, I had 1,548 happy hours on old Dumbo, and thought I had left her behind forever as I left Saigon to move to Tachikawa, Japan, and the larger four-engine DC-4.165

Certain flights for USAID could get quite distasteful, and that were flights that had to transport live animals. Former Air America pilot John Deakin recalls a mission in South Vietnam, where he had to transport pigs in his C-46: “Man, do they get interesting! They all smell bad, and they all make a lot of noise. Some can make real trouble, and thereby hangs this tail ... er, tale. Why on earth would we haul live animals? Well, the ravages of war are hard on livestock and food supplies, and we’d often relocate whole villages from a danger area to a safer spot (only to move ‘em again months later). Some livestock was flown in to serve as breeding stock, but I’d guess very few of the animals that I delivered survived more than a few days before being consigned to the cook pot. In a few cases, live animals would be air-dropped by parachute. On at least one occasion I’m familiar with, live pigs were air-dropped without parachutes, presumably to be eaten that night, as none, to my knowledge, survived the drop (no matter how hard they flapped their fat little legs). This was long before Animal Rights, of course – can you imagine the furor that operation would cause today?

A much more conventional method was to box the pigs up in cheap, flimsy wooden-slat crates, wrapped in chicken wire. (I could never understand why they don’t call it ‘Pig Wire.’) We’d stack up a whole bunch of these crates from the floor to the ceiling in the C-46, over hard against the right side, leaving only a narrow passage along the left side of the airplane for the crew to get in and out. I was much skinnier in those days, but it was still a chore to wiggle through that passage. Stink? Whooee! One of those trips, and there wasn’t enough hot water in Saigon for me to wash the smell off for a week! Some uncharitable people said they didn’t notice any difference, but I always ignored them and figured their sense of smell was too delicate. The normal airflow in a C-46 cabin is forward, which is nice for detecting smoke or fuel leaks, but it is not exactly optimum with a load of pigs. We always flew with the overwing hatches out, which helped pull some of the smell out, once we got off the ground.”166

Some flights for USAID transported rice seeds, rolled oats, agricultural ‘resettlement kits’, or hospital material.167 Other USAID programs required the transportation of civilian passengers like wounded natives in the aerial ambulance program, nurse supervisors and other social workers like veterinaries and vaccinators in USAID hospital and farm programs or VIPs visiting South Vietnam like, in 1965, Richard Nixon did before becoming president. Probably the most demanding aspect of Air America’s contracts with USAID were medevac missions into hot areas, when Air America helicopters flew to villages that had been rocketed during the night to bring in USAID people and medical teams to arrange for help on the place and to carry out the severely wounded to a nearby airport from where they could be flown into a hospital. On these occasions, the helicopters were regularly mobbed by local people who all wanted to be carried out, so that a strong crew member had to keep them off the helicopter.168

From the log book of French N. Smith169 we can see how those Bell 204Bs were used that were assigned to Air America’s contract with the USAF’s Logistical Support Group. Between 1 and 21 January 66, Smith flew in the Saigon area, receiving sling instruction in N8511F on 10 January. From 24 to 30 January 66, he flew N8514F out of Nha Trang, including a Search and Rescue mission on 24 January. The following month, he flew some med-evac missions in the Saigon area and made 2 landings aboard the U.S.S. Corpus Christi on 22 February. On 24 February 66, he flew N8511F to Nha Trang, where he remained until 9

168 Robbins, Air America, pp.155+163.
169 Preserved at UTD/Leary/B48F6.
Bell 204B N8514F in the mid-sixties, still displaying the old Air America colors, with Brian Johnson standing in front

(UTD/Johnson-1-BJ5-1-S20)

March, receiving battle damage on 7 March 66. After returning to Saigon on 9 March, he remained there until 30 April, flying some med-evac missions and picking up a downed Air America pilot on 12 April. On 30 April, he ferried N8535F to Nha Trang, where he flew no less than 8 med-evac missions until 8 May. After a couple of days of R&R, Smith went up to Danang on 28 May, where he flew N8514F that, on 31 May 66, even had bar weapons installed in the doors. ¹⁷⁰ Later, French Smith recalled his 2 ½ years of flying at Saigon as “a little bit of everything. He carried rice, ammo, people, medevacs, ARVN soldiers into battle.” ¹⁷¹

Med-evac missions could also be adventurous, because the helicopters were often mobbed. After a village had been rocketed during the night, Air America would fly in a USAID customer to assess the situation and arrange to fly in medical teams or to fly out the wounded. As soon as the helicopter would land, “there would be so many of them, and because they couldn’t all go at the same time they would mob the ship. [...] We could only take eight and there would be eighty people wanting to get on. You had to have a strong man at the door to let one in at a time and then close the door so we could get away. Then a lot of them would stand on the skids. It was important to have a pretty big guy along.” ¹⁷² As to French Smith, he was assigned to Saigon and to several outside stations during the following months, and he often notes “med-evac” flight, “battle damage” or “picked up a downed pilot” in his log book. For 27 October 66, Smith notes that he evacuated 23 dead in the Saigon area, flying Bell 204B N1306X. For 16 November 66, he again notes “evac 18 dead ARVN”, flying N8512F in the Saigon area, and after Smith had ferried N1304X from Saigon to Can Tho on 5 December 66, he had to evacuate 9 dead in the Mekong Delta on 9 December and to “infil” agents into Cambodia. Among his duties also was to recover downed Company aircraft, and

¹⁷¹ French N. Smith, Interview, conducted by Prof. Bill Leary, Corpus Christi, TX, on 25 July 85, in: UTD/Leary/B48F6.
¹⁷² Air America’s Ted Helmers, quoted from: Robbins, Air America, p.163.
for 12 January 67, when Smith flew Bell 204B N8513F, he notes: “Recovery of 85X”. Indeed, Air America PC-6 N185X had been destroyed approximately 6 nautical miles west of Chu Lai (V-194), on 12 January 67, when it had flown into a ridge in bad weather, while on a routine flight from Danang (V-03) to Quang Ngai (V-23), killing the pilot, Frank Farthing, and 4 passengers. In South Vietnam, Air America’s Bell 204Bs were more than once used to recover small Company aircraft that had crashed.

An Air America Bell 204B airlifts the ill-fated Do-28 B-931 back to Saigon in November 67 (Air America Log, vol. II, no. 5, 1968, p. 2)

On 14 March 67, French Smith ferried N1304X from Saigon to Danang, where he remained until 18 March, and during that short period, he evacuated 32 dead and flew 4 med-evac missions. Indeed, Danang was always considered to be a tougher assignment, because those helicopters worked in the northern zone and were frequently up by the DMZ. During the following months, many of the Bell 204B missions that Smith flew were of the same kind, that is med-evac flights and the evacuation of dead; for 20 May and 8 June 67, he notes “med-evacs during fire-fight”, and for 26 May (out of Danang) and 7 June 67 (out of Saigon) he notes that he flew “infol”, probably ARVN people in both cases, into enemy territory. On 6 September 67, Smith picked up a downed ARVN pilot, while flying N1305X from Vinh Long (V-20) to Vung Tau (V-05), and on 8 November 67, he picked up a downed US pilot in the Danang area, while flying N1304X. An especially dramatic mission seems to have occurred on 6 December 67, when Smith flew N8514F out of Nha Trang, for he notes in his log book: “5 med-evacs under fire (one at nite), Vietnamese choppers refused to fly”. In mid-January 68, French Smith left South Vietnam, as he was assigned to set up a helicopter training school for the Royal Thai Border Police, training pilots first at Bangkok (T-09) and then at Hua Hin (T-10). At the same time in early 68, when the US military was beleaguered at Khe Sanh,

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174 Minutes of Meetings of Executive Committees of Air Asia Co Ltd and Air America Inc of 24 January 67, in: UTD/CIA/B8F2.
176 Robbins, Air America, p.156.
Air America helicopters flew to the surrounding villages in the middle of bad weather and constant ground-fire; their main task in the area was to haul out the badly wounded.\footnote{Robbins, \textit{Air America}, p.156.} Mark Albertson served with Air America as a flight mechanic in Vietnam. In a letter written in 2005 to Allen Cates, he describes some of Air America’s Bell 204B missions that he flew in South Vietnam as a flight mechanic on helicopters that were assigned to the USAID contract: “1) 27 Sept. 1966 on N1304X flying in the CanTho region (V17) we took out four wounded from a Special Forces camp. Probably Vietnamese. 2) 6 Oct. 1966 on N1307X with Captain James – flew in the Saigon area. Flew a General and five people with him – did recon work. 3) 11 Oct. 1966 on N1304X with Captain Greenway – flew a Special Forces Sergeant from V17 to his “A” team camp. V17 was a Special Forces “B” team camp that supported all the “A” teams in the Delta area. 4) 13 Oct. 1966 on N1304X with Captain Greenway – took mail to a Special Forces camp. May have been V193. 5) 14 Oct. 1966 on N1304X with Captain Greenway – V17 and V193 did a lot of flying into Special Forces camps – mail and supplies were main cargo. 6) 6 Jan.1967 on N8513F with Captains Mehaffey and Lawson – had a couple of US Army door gunners for a recon flight in the V169 and V173 areas. 7) 13 Sept.1967 on N1303X with Captains James and Basham – flew a two star general around by the name of Forsytie. Block hours of 5+27. 8) 31 Oct. 1967 on N1303X with Captains Peyton and Basham – only comment was ‘did a lot of work for the army’ Block hours of 11+06. 9) 31 Mar.1968 on N1306X with Captains Barker and Rausch – flying out of the Saigon area we heard a mayday in the afternoon from an Army Huey. We were the first chopper on the scene so we picked up the crew of five Americans. 10) 28 Apr.1968 on N1050X with Captains Rolston and Lawson – we were doing low-level recons for MACV. We spotted some VC trucks and the Army on board shot them up a bit with small arm’s fire then a FAC came around and dumped artillery on them and finally the Air Force bombed the site. 11) 11 May 1968 on N1304X with Captains Barker and Collard flying out of V17 – our ship was used as a command post for an US Army Search and Destroy operation. 12) 12 May 1968 on N1304X with Captains Collard and Barker – we went out to an LST mother ship this afternoon for a med-a-vac. An American Navy gunner on a PBR boat was shot while bending over. The round went from his chest through his lung and liver. We took him to a US medical facility at Dom Tam, on the way there two American doctors we had on board worked on him. He died about five minutes after we got him on the ground. Loss of blood was the main reason. There’s more to this story but I think you have enough information for your needs. A very sad day for all of us involved. 13) On several occasions we flew US Army Paymasters around to outposts so old MPC could be exchanged for new MPC by the US personnel at these locations. 14) I remember one flight out of Pleiku where we had a US Army General and his VIP party on board for the day. We flew at his direction. The only reason I remember this particular flight is we dropped off our passengers and went back to Pleiku to refuel. At the POL dump some Army Captain came up to us as I was about to start refuelling and said he wasn’t running a gas station and for us to go somewhere else for fuel. We then went back and picked up the General and his party. He wanted to go somewhere else but we told him we couldn’t get fuel. He directed us back to Pleiku. When we landed the same Captain came out again to tell us we still couldn’t refuel. The general informed him that he was running a gas station and that he personally (the Captain) would refuel our aircraft.” After Mark Albertson was wounded on 7 November 1968, he was first taken to a nearby Special Forces ‘A’ Team camp for initial treatment and then “flew on another AAM 204B to Saigon’s Third Field Army Hospital where I had an emergency operation on my left hand. I

\footnote{Letter by Mark Albertson to Allen Cates, quoted by Allen Cates in his letter dated 15 December 2005 sent to James D. Johnston, DoD Civilian / Military Service Review Board, pp.18-20, kindly forwarded to the author.}
stayed at the hospital approximately 10 to 12 days.” All of these Bell 204Bs were assigned to contract AID/VN-23 at that time, and so this makes clear, that Air America’s Bell 204Bs assigned to contract AID/VN-23 were used for reconnaissance flights, med-evac flights, to transport people, mail and cargo to Special Forces camps, to transport VIPs and US Army Paymasters, and as command posts in US Army operations.

But aircraft assigned to USAID contracts sometimes also carried weapons, ammunition, and indigenous troops, apparently on programs for the CIA. Those missions could be quite dangerous: When a plane full of weapons and ammunition was hit by ground fire, it could easily explode, or, if it was able to make an emergency landing in an insecure area, the crew would probably be considered to be enemies and captured or even shot. This happened to the crew of Air America C-47A B-929 on 14 January 66, when that aircraft flew under the provisions of contract no. AID-430-1092. As the report of the Air Asia Co Ltd Board of Review, dated 11 February 1966, states, “B-929, en route from Saigon to Vi Thanh in Chuong Thien Province, made an emergency landing at approximately 0740L January 14, 1966 approximately 11 miles north of Vi Thanh, as the result of Viet Cong gunfire. Indications are that immediately after the landing, the aircraft had sustained only minor damage, and crew members W[illiam] R. Pruner, pilot; [Johnny Y.H. Chang], co-pilot; and [Nguyen Van Thai], air freight dispatcher, were alive. A helicopter rescue team of Air America personnel, however, later removed the bodies of Captain Pruner and First Officer [Chang], dead of gunshot wounds, and reported [Nguyen Van Thai] missing and presumed captured by Viet Cong.” The radio messages related to that accident add that Captain Mouser, First Officer Barnhisel, and Flight Mechanic Janik had been on their way in Bell 204B N8411F, to help the downed crew, but were equally hit by ground fire at 0035Z (Greenwich Zebra time), that is 8.35 hours local time, and then airlifted the dead airmen to Saigon; afterwards, at 0223Z hours, that is 10.23 hours local time, B-929 was deliberately destroyed by friendly forces. The fact that B-929 was deliberately destroyed seems to confirm that the aircraft had been carrying ammunition.

A good example of aircraft assigned to a USAID contract that were actually transporting indigenous troops for the CIA was Porter N9444. In May 68, this PC-6 was a basic aircraft assigned to contract AID/VN-23, so it was probably assigned to contract no. AID-430-2178, the predecessor of AID/VN-23, when the following accident occurred: On 7 July 67, PC-6 “N9444, which was engaged in a Montagnard troop movement from Quang Tri to Khe Sanh, South Vietnam, departed Quang Tri at 0906L. There were six Montagnard tribesmen and one American, the Province Officer, aboard. An uneventful flight and landing was made to Khe Sanh. […] When the Captain observed the troops deplaning, he retarded his power and turned toward the cabin area in an attempt to caution the passengers about the propeller. They had been previously briefed by an interpreter. The first Montagnard to disembark walked forward and adjacent to the right side of the aircraft and into the rotating propeller and was fatally injured.”

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182 List “Operational deaths”, in: UTD/Leary/B34F1.
183 In: UTD/CIA/B34F1.
184 XOXOs in: UTD/Hickler/B26F16.
185 See the explanation of the time system in the report of the accident of UH-34D H-44 at Luang Prabang (L-54) on 1 July 69 (in: UTD/Dreifus/B1F10).
186 See also Robbins, Air America, pp.154-58.

37
3) Help from China Airlines:

Since May 65, China Airlines operated certain flights for Air America in South Vietnam, using 2 C-123s bailed from the USAF plus at least one C-46 basically assigned to contract no. 65-61 dated 23 April 65. Already on 30 March 65, the USAF’s 2nd Division of Tan Son Nhut airbase had transferred C-123Bs 54-0625 and 54-0675 to code “TL”, that is to outside the USAF; China Airlines operated them as “625” and “675”.\(^\text{189}\) China Airlines provided C-46D B-1535 (msn 22367), which was operated for Air America as “CA-1”; when this aircraft was destroyed on 28 April 66, it was replaced by another China Airlines C-46, which became the second “CA-1” in 1966.\(^\text{190}\) This second “CA-1” had several accidents, while operating for Air America: On 15 March 67, it nosed over, while landing at Tan Son Nhut (V-01), damaging both props,\(^\text{191}\) but the aircraft was successfully repaired. On 23 June 67, misfortune struck again, when the left hand gear of “CA-1” collapsed at Vung Tau (V-05).\(^\text{192}\) In both cases there had been no injuries, and the aircraft was repaired again.

Contract nos. 65-61 (of 23 April 65), page 1, and 67-63 (of 27 Sept. 67), page 1, that China Airlines had with Air America (both preserved in: UTD/CIA/B40F3)

But the contract also provided for the service of additional C-123s and C-46s when requested by Air America for call orders. As to additional C-123s necessary for assisting in building up the US military force in South Vietnam in 1965/66, “5661” and “5644”, 2 aircraft that the USAF had leased to the Republic of China Air Force (RoCAF) for flying into North Vietnam, were operated for Air America by China Airlines for a short time.\(^\text{193}\)

\(^{189}\) USAF Aircraft Assignment Records, Microfilm reel no. AVH-3. In 1968, this serial system was changed, and the aircraft became “ST-1” and “ST-2” of no obvious meaning.

\(^{190}\) For details and references given for these identities see the C-46 file of this database.

\(^{191}\) XOXO of 15 March 67, in: UTD/Hickler/B26F16.

\(^{192}\) XOXO of 23 June 67, in: UTD/Hickler/B26F16.

\(^{193}\) E-mails dated 29 July 2007 and 5 August 2007, kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu. Their identities are believed to have been two out of 54-0643, 54-0657, 54-0715, and 55-4534; see the C-123 file of this database.
of China Air Force also furnished some of the additional C-46s that flew for Air America in South Vietnam, while others came from China Airlines. Initially, China Airlines operated no less than 5 additional C-46s for Air America, all of them arriving in 1965: The first was China Airlines C-46 B-1541 (msn 33569), which became “CA-2”. This C-46 had several accidents, while operating for Air America: On 21 September 66, CA-2 ran off the runway into soft sand at Tuy Hoa (V-113), bending both props were bent; after some days, the aircraft was repaired. Then, upon landing at Tan Son Nhut on 18 February 67 after a flight from Vung Tau with 60 passengers on board, “CA-2” lost hydraulic fluid so that the brakes malfunctioned and CA-2 ran into USAF C-47 0-49679, which was parked there; the damage to “CA-2” was a large hole from the leading edge of the left wing thru to the landing light and so on. The aircraft was repaired, but it is unknown if it went into service for Air America again, as the Company’s new contract with China Airlines reduced the number of additional aircraft that Air America could call for: While contract no. 65-61 of 23 April 65 had included

194 Msn kindly supplied by Billy K. C. Chang (Director General, CAA, Republic of China) in his e-mail to the author dated 2 July 2007; for details, see the C-46 file of this database.
2 basic C-123s and 1 basic C-46 plus an unspecified number of additional C-123s and C-46s upon request, contract no. 67-63 of 27 September 67 did not change the number of aircraft that were basically assigned, but reduced the number of additional aircraft to one C-46. So apparently, “CA-2” reverted to B-1541, and when B-1541 crashed en route Phan Rang – Pleiku on 24 October 67, it was no longer operated for Air America. While “CA-1” remained the basic C-46, the “call” aircraft still assigned to the new contract was “CA-3”, a gray and white aircraft whose identity is unknown: It appears on the list of aircraft operated for Air America Saigon at least between February 68 and March 1970, but is no longer listed in April 70. Apparently, “CA-3” returned to China Airlines in late March 70, as it was no longer needed: The contract that Air America concluded with China Airlines in 1970 provided for only 1 C-46, and that was a call aircraft; “CA-1” also fitted to this new role. During the period 1965/66 period, there was also an aluminum C-46 serialled “CA-4”, which was photographed while landing at Danang in May 1966; but it was no longer current in February 68. All of these aircraft were primarily operated for the US Embassy, that is for supporting CIA Province projects, and transported all sorts of supplies including concertina wire. On one occasion, a China Airlines C-123 dropped into the sea the remaining boxes of insecure hand grenades, some of which had exploded prematurely.

Two more C-46s came from the Republic of China Air Force. “In 1965, the Ministry of Society of South Vietnam […] asked Taiwan to help through Air America. RoCAF sent C-46s and crews to Vietnam under the cover name of China Airlines. They were named ‘Helping Vietnam Airlift Team.’ The first commander of the team was Lt. Col. Chao Jen-shia. At first the team had seven officers, three mechanics and two C-46s. They borrowed two radiomen from the 34th Sqn.” On 25 November 65, C-46s “CA-5”, piloted by Lt. Col. Chao Jen-shia, and “CA-6”, piloted by Captain Wang Su-ru, took off from Sungshan Airport, Taipei, and landed at Tan Son Nhut airport, Saigon, that afternoon; there was a reception ceremony to welcome the aircraft. They merged into the 33rd Wing of the South Vietnamese Air Force and only carried out airlift missions inside South Vietnam. On 11 June 66, “CA-5” was flown back to Taiwan on 11 June 66 by Lt. Col. Chao Jen-shia. Three days earlier, on 8 June 66, the Republic of China Air Force had sent C-46 “CA-7” to Saigon to replace “CA-5”. But “CA-7” did not survive for a very long time, because on 14 July 66, it had a landing accident at Kuan Yi, when it landed along the wind direction and ran out of the runway. The China Airlines person stationed in Vietnam came to the scene and declared that the C-46 was damaged beyond repair. What happened to C-46 “CA-6” is unknown, but it probably returned to the Republic of China Air Force in 1966 or 67, as Air America’s first Saigon Base Monthly Report available, that is that of February 68, does not mention it any longer.

Sometimes, these China Airlines aircraft flew very special missions. One of them was Project “Nightingale” in late 1966, to which 2 Americans were assigned. One of them was Albert A. Roberts, who told Prof. William Leary the following story: “Three China Airlines C-123s […] were staged out of Saigon. These Chinese-crewed airplanes were controlled and

197 Contract nos. 65-61 (of 23 April 65) and 67-63 (of 27 Sept. 67), both preserved in: UTD/CIA/B40F3.
199 Saigon monthly base reports February 68 to April 70, in: UTD/CIA/B42; no such reports are available for the period prior to February 68.
201 See the photo of “CA-4” in: Love, Wings of Air America, p. 21; Saigon monthly base report of February 68, in: UTD/CIA/B42F5; it probably returned to China Airlines.
202 Harnage, A thousand faces, p.6.
203 Harnage, A thousand faces, p.33.
204 E-mail dated 22 October 2006, kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu.
205 E-mail dated 22 October 2006, kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu who also mentions that the identity of either “CA-5” or “CA-6” was ex RoCAF “C-46 327”.
206 Air America’s Saigon monthly base report of February 68, in: UTD/CIA/B42.
briefed by Air America. George Calhoun, Chief Pilot at Saigon, was in charge of ‘Project Nightingale’, working with customer Caesar Savatello (Scivatello?). The training was done at Vung Tau. ‘Nightingale’ was designed to harass enemy troops, keeping them awake and moving. Roberts would pick up a ‘package’ from USAF ammunition stores. It weighed about 20 pounds and was rigged to sound like small arms and grenades. Roberts was responsible for setting the fuses. He used two chemical fuses (two pencils each), which would be crimped so that they would detonate the packages anywhere from 15 minutes to 24 hours after being dropped. The packages would be dropped freefall from under 2,000 feet on night missions on suspected areas of enemy movement, usually in the area north of Attopeu and Tchepone around the DMZ.”

4) The creation of CORDS

“In May 1967 an organization known as CORDS – Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support – was formed to coordinate the U.S. civil and military pacification programs. A unique hybrid civil-military structure directly under general William C. Westmoreland, the COMUSMACV, CORDS was headed by a civilian, Ambassador Robert W. Komer, who was appointed as Westmoreland’s deputy. CORDS pulled together all the various U.S. military and civilian agencies involved in the pacification effort, including the State Department, the AID, the USIA and the CIA. U.S. military or civilian province senior advisers were appointed, and CORDS civilian/military advisory teams were dispatched throughout South Vietnam’s 44 provinces and 250 districts.” Almost all pacification programs came under CORDS. “From USAID, CORDS took control of “new life development” (the catch-all term for an attempt to improve government responsiveness to villagers’ needs), refugees, National Police, and the Chieu Hoi program (the “Open Arms” campaign to encourage Communist personnel in South Vietnam to defect). The CIA’s Rural Development cadre, MACV’s civic action and civil affairs, and the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office’s field psychological operations also fell under the CORDS aegis. CORDS assumed responsibility for reports, evaluations, and field inspections from all agencies.”

On province level, this integration of civilian and military efforts meant that the senior adviser was to advise the province chief in military operations, pacification efforts, and civil affairs. Brigadier General Philip Bolté (US Army, ret.), who, beginning in December 67, was the province senior adviser to Quang Tri province, recalls: “On my staff, I had a deputy sector adviser who was a lieutenant colonel. In addition, I had a military adviser for each for each of the staff members in intelligence, logistic, operations, etc. On the civilian side, I had a civilian deputy province senior adviser. Under him were refugee advisers, a Chieu Hoi adviser, two logistics advisers, an engineer adviser, etc. Two American Red Cross representatives were there also, and I supported them, although they were not under my command. We also had a military province hospital assistance team. Although they were a U.S. Navy unit, they were attached to me. In fact, a Seabee detachment located at Tam Ky was building a new province hospital.” So CORDS successfully integrated the command structure, with the exception of the CIA. “For example, I wanted to pool our helicopters and airplanes”, Brigadier General

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207 Interview with Albert A. Roberts conducted by Prof. William Leary at Washington on 29 June 1991, written summary at: UTD/Leary/B43F4.


210 Andrade / Willbanks, “CORDS / Phoenix”, p.15.

211 “The Chieu Hoi Program was an initiative by the South Vietnamese to encourage defection by the Viet Cong and their supporters to the side of the Government during the Vietnam War. Defection was urged by means of a propaganda campaign, usually leaflets delivered by artillery shell or dropped over enemy-controlled areas by aircraft, or messages broadcast over areas of South Vietnam” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chieu_Hoi).

Philip Bolté adds, “but they were against it. [...] It was really more of an administrative problem than anything else. I simply tried to streamline things, as with the helicopters. They, of course, had Air America, and my military helicopter support came from Da Nang. They wanted to remain separate.”\(^{213}\) As after the big-unit war of 1965 and 1966 a new clear-and-hold strategy aimed at moving into rural enclaves formerly dominated by the Viet Cong was implemented in 1968, CORDS was very successful in bringing manpower, money, and supplies to the countryside where they were needed, so that between 1968 and 1971, the government made rapid advances in pacifying the countryside.\(^{214}\)

It was soon after the creation of CORDS that a new effort was undertaken to destroy the Viet Cong infrastructure in South Vietnam. In July 67, a central Intelligence Coordination and Exploitation Program (ICEX) was created, but was then decentralized under its new name Phoenix in December 67. Within months, all 44 provinces and most of the districts had American Phoenix advisers, so that anti-infrastructure operations became one of the most important aspects of the pacification program, but they were no longer carried out by the military, but by local militia and police. The most important of these forces were the Regional Forces (RF) and Popular Forces (PF) militia who lived in the villages, the National Police, and the Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU).\(^{215}\) a relatively small group that was recruited and trained by the CIA.\(^{216}\) On many occasions, these forces needed air transportation for their operations against the Viet Cong infrastructure, especially in the early seventies, when the Communists tried to reassert control over areas previously lost due to the pacification program.\(^{217}\) And the best air transportation available was Air America.

5) Business as before

Nevertheless, the creation of CORDS in May 67 did not immediately affect Air America’s system of contracts. To start with the smallest Saigon customer: At an unknown date in 1968, contract AF62(531)-1845 that Air America had had with the Department of Defense’s Advanced Research Projects Agency, to support defoliant and communications research, was replaced by contract F62531-68-C-0007 with the CSG, i.e. the US Army Composite Service Group: And like its predecessor, this contract covered only Do-28 N2002F at Saigon, plus another handful of mostly small aircraft at Bangkok: Ten Two N5454V, Helio B-881, and UH-34D “803”.\(^{218}\) On 1 September 68, contract F62-531-68-C0007 was replaced by contract F62-531-68-C0005.\(^{219}\) But there were also no immediate changes to the contract that Air America had with the “big” military customer, that is with the Logistical Support Group. Already on 31 March 67, the Logistical Support Group had asked Air America to extend the period of performance of contract AF49(604)-4395 thru 30 June 68. While this extension is explainable by the early date of that request, there was also another extension of that same

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214 Andrade / Willbanks, “CORDS / Phoenix”, pp.10/1, 16.
215 In 1966, the old Counter Terror Teams created by the CIA were renamed PRU; they were the most effective unit type within the Phoenix program. The PRU were composed of Vietnamese, but their advisers were American (Vikraken, “The role of the Provincial Reconnaissance Units in the Phoenix Program of the Vietnam War”, pp.1-6).
216 The CIA supplied weapons, explosives, and communications equipment, and there was even a training camp at Vung Tau (Ranelagh / Molloy, Phoenix, tape of the German version, at 5 and 10 minutes).
217 Andrade / Willbanks, “CORDS / Phoenix”, pp.18/9, 21.
219 The Saigon Base flight time report for August 68 (located within Memorandum no. GM-SGN-68-243 dated 7 October 68, that is within Air America’s Saigon Base monthly report for September 68, in: UTD/CIA/B42F5) still lists aircraft flown under contract no. –C0007, the same report for September 68 (in: UTD/CIA/B42F5) lists the same aircraft plus some more as flown under contract –C0005.
Air America Do-28 N2002F, accident at Saigon
(with kind permission from Ward S. Reimer)

LSG, letter to Air America dated 31 March 67 and asking to extend Contract AF49(604)-4395 thru 30 June 68, plus another extension of the same contract signed on 3 September 68 (both documents in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.21)


220 Letter dated 31 March 67 sent by the LSG to Air America, and contract AF49(604)-4395 effective 1 July 68, both in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.21.
N748N, N393R, and N12450), two Helios (XW-PBS and XW-PBT), and five Bell 204Bs (N8511F, N8512F, N8513F, N8514F, and N8535F). So in spite of the creation of CORDS in May 67, the overall situation for contract AF49(604)-4395 was more or less the same in May 68 as it had been in May 66.

This contract that Air America had with the military allowed them to carry prisoners, (for example to Con Son, the notorious prison island), Green Berets, the secret Special Operations Group, CIA agents and payrolls and CIA personnel attached to the Phoenix program developed to coordinate an attack against the Viet Cong infrastructure among all South Vietnamese and American police, intelligence, and military units, as well as small arms and ammunition. As the CIA also had a small mercenary army in South Vietnam, mostly Montagnards, Air America aircraft – i.e. Caribous – were also used to fly them around. When Khe Sanh was besieged by Communist troops from January to April 1968, Air America Bell 204Bs hauled the badly wounded out of the surrounding villages. But most Air America flights in South Vietnam were relatively quiet compared to services operated in Laos – except for those aircraft that were temporarily based at Danang and worked in the northern area and were frequently up by the Demilitarized Zone. Air America’s Danang station had started in July 1965 in a 8 x 15 foot wooden shack sitting on some sand near a runway and a total personnel of five: three mechanics, one laborer and Station Manager Gil Stafford, but by late 1968, Air America’s Danang personnel had grown to 136 employees, handling all types of aircraft from Helio Couriers to C-46s or Bell 204B helicopters. At that time, the station handled about 650-900 transit aircraft or 2,400 passengers and 3 million pounds of cargo per month, and also operated two hostels for RON (Remain Over Night) crews and visitors, averaging some 20-25 people for about 8 RON aircraft per night.

The picture is more complex for the contracts that Air America had with USAID. By 11 April 67, contract AID-430-2178 replacing contract AID-430-1092 had already been completed and signed, probably effective 1 June 67. Little is known about the aircraft assigned to this particular contract, as it lasted only for a couple of months. At least Volpar N91248, Do-28 B-931, and six Helios were assigned to that contract: B-839 (partly operating out of Nha Trang into Region 3), B-857 (partly operating out of Saigon into Region 3), B-865 (partly operating out of Danang into Region 2), B-867 (partly operating out of Can Tho into Region 4), B-869 (partly operating out of Can Tho into Region 4), and B-875 (partly operating out of Danang into Region 1). Apparently on 1 December 67, contract AID-430-2178 was replaced by contract AID/VN-23. This was a really big contract that covered no less than 45 aircraft: five C-46s (N67984, B-910, B-924, B-926, and B-928), nine C-47s (B-817, B-829, “083”, “084”, “147”, “559”, “607”, “949”, and “994”), one Caribou (N539Y), one Do-28 (N2001F), three Volpars (N6154U, N9518Z, and N9956Z), six Ten-Twos (N77Y, N343T, N5269V, N9521Z, N9573Z, and N21412), four C-45s (N4933C, N9073Z, N9871Z, N9871Z, N931, and N12450), two Helios (XW-PBS and XW-PBT), and five Bell 204Bs (N8511F, N8512F, N8513F, N8514F, and N8535F).

222 Robbins, Air America, p.167.
224 Minutes of Meetings of Executive Committees of Air Asia Co Ltd and Air America Inc of 11 April 67, in: UTD/CIA/B8F2.
225 Contract AID-430-2178 is not available, but in his log book (in: UTD/Wofford/S.C.6), Captain Robert L. Wofford always notes the contract he was flying for, and the first entry for contract AID-430-2178 was on 1 June 67, when he ferried Helio B-865 from Saigon to Danang for operation in Region 2 as directed.
226 Crashed on 23 March 67 (List “Deceased employees”, in: UTD/Leary/B34F1).
227 Crashed on 17 November 67 (List “Deceased employees”, in: UTD/Leary/B34F1).
229 Contract AID/VN-23 isn’t available either, but in Robert Wofford’s log book (in: UTD/Wofford/S.C.6), the last entry for contract AID-430-2178 was on 28 November 67 (when he flew Helio B-839 out of Saigon into Region 3 as directed), and the first entry for contract AID/VN-23 was on 23 December 67, when he flew Helio B-869 out of Danang into Region 1 as directed.)
and N9898Z), five Porters (N285L, N391R, N394R, N9444, and N358F), six Helios (B-839, B-857, B-865, B-867, B-869, and B-875), and five Bell 204Bs (N1303X, N1304X, N1305X, N1306X, and N1307X). So, together with the aircraft assigned to the other contracts and to a certain number of spare aircraft, the total number of Air America aircraft based at Saigon at that time comprised no less than 76 aircraft, that is 8 C-46s, 9 C-47s, 3 Caribous, 22 Beech 18s (some of them modified to become Volpar Turbo Beeches), 2 Do-28s, 13 PC-6s, 9 Helio Couriers, and 10 Bell 204Bs of Air America aircraft that were based at Saigon on 1 May 68. Of these 76 aircraft, 45 were assigned to contract AID/VN-23, 23 were assigned to contract AF49(604)-4395, one was assigned to contract F62-531-68-C0007, and 7 were unassigned. But not only the number of Air America aircraft that were based at Saigon went up between late 1965 and May 68: A similar augmentation can be observed regarding the number of flying hours: In April 64, the total flying activity was at 6,611 hours, in October 64 at 8,514 hours, in April 65 at 12,542 hours, in October 65 at 15,176 hours, in May 66 at 18,104 hours, in December 66 at 20,708 hours, and in October 67 at 24,349 hours. This was the ceiling, as since that time, the total flying activity of Air America went slightly back – to 22,034 hours in October 68 and even to 20,205 hours in October 69. For the most part, this constant expansion we have until 1968, reflects the development of the war in South Vietnam, where it coincided with a constant augmentation of the number of daily aircraft departures and a cargo traffic rate steadily going up.

6) The Tet Offensive

Most people would say that for the entire War in Vietnam, the big turning point was the Tet Offensive of 30 January 1968. How things worked out a couple of days before, can be seen in Air America’s Saigon Daily Flight Schedule for 11 January 68 that has survived: C-46s B-910, B-924, B-926, B-928, and N67984 departed Saigon between 6 a.m. and 7 a.m. and were expected back only between 7 p.m. and 8.40 p.m. C-47s “083”, “084”, “559”, “607”, and N67984 departed Saigon between 6 a.m. and 7 a.m. and were expected back only between 7 p.m. and 8.40 p.m. C-47s “083”, “084”, “559”, “607”,

Air America C-47 “607” at Nha Trang in early 1968

(UTD/Misc.Mat./B4F4)

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“949” were also busy the whole day, while C-47 “147” performed scheduled flight no. 21B and C-47 B-829 was transferred to its new operational base at Danang (V-03). Only one of the Caribous (N544Y) departed Saigon that day, and only 8 aircraft of Air America’s big Beech 18 fleet appear on that schedule: Volpars N6154U and N91295 as well as C-45 N77Y were used on scheduled flights, N9898Z and N9518Z worked in Region III, N9855Z was used for local training, N4933C left for Tainan maintenance, and the mission of N6622C is not specified. That is also true for the mission that Helio B-867 flew that day. Of the Porters, N748N was used on the Bien Hoa Courier, and N185K left for its temporary base to Can Tho (V-17). Only 2 Bell 204Bs (N1304X and N8511F) worked out of Saigon that day, while Bell N8514F also left for its new temporary base to Can Tho (V-17). Things were still routine and more or less quiet on 11 January 68.

Then, the ceremonies of the Buddhist New Year or Tet came on 30 January 1968. It is well known that on that occasion, Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops attacked 5 big cities and about 80 towns in South Vietnam from outside, while at the same time Viet Cong combatants supported them from the interior of these cities trying to call forth a revolution. While in most cities, this so called “Tet Offensive”, was smothered within a few days, the fighting was particularly hard and long at Huế and Saigon; the citadel of Huế was taken by US Marines only on 22 February, and in Saigon, the fighting even reached the US Embassy. It was only in March 68 that all enemy activities in the South Vietnamese cities had been crushed.

The day before, the CIA Station had indications that trouble was brewing and requested that one helicopter crew and one Caribou crew stand by at the airport. Air America’s Base Manager Merrill Hulse ordered even one crew for each aircraft type to stay overnight at the airport. After the early morning attacks, Air America helicopters picked up more flight crews and brought them to Tan Son Nhut airport, as ground transportation was impossible due to heavy fighting. Then helicopters began flying missions to and from the Embassy roof top (called “Bunker Hill”) to fly Embassy and AID personnel to more secure locations and to take CIA personnel on reconnaissance flights around Saigon so that they could assess what the hour-by-hour situation was. Helicopters also lifted AID medical supplies and personnel from the USAID storage area in Cholon to the airport, where people and supplies were transferred to Air America fixed-wing aircraft in order to be flown out. At the airport, For the first 2 weeks, no Vietnamese or third-country nationals (TCN’s) were allowed to enter the Air America area. Repair and maintenance had to be done by American personnel and by the Vietnamese and TCN’s who were on the base when the attack started. They worked long hours to keep the aircraft, especially the Bell 204B helicopters on CIA requests. Air America pilots, all American, took over many of the functions normally performed by Vietnamese and the TCN’s who could not report to work.235 Air America personnel who were flying every day slept at the airport and went for five days at a time without shaving or changing cloths; and because of the constant sniper fire, it was even dangerous to approach the planes, refuel them, and take off.236

Not only Saigon Base, but also some of the Air America Stations came under attack. In Danang, the airfield was hit by enemy mortars, but the Air America buildings suffered no damage. Air America remained completely operational and maintained its 2 Bell 204Bs and 6 fixed-wing aircraft on a station at all times. Nha Trang, which had 2 helicopters and 9 fixed-wing aircraft on station, escaped attack. At Can Tho however, 4 aircraft were badly damaged. The functions performed by Saigon Base and the Stations varied in accordance with local requirements: They evacuated stranded case officers, delivered ammunition, and resupplied many CIA regional offices with food, water, medicine and other vital supplies. They also

236 Robbins, Air America, p.164/5.
supplied isolated National Police units and withdrew casualties. During the first 24 hours, flying was reduced to urgent missions, but by the end of February 68, Air America flying was almost at normal.\footnote{Leary, Manuscript, ch. VI, pp. 611/2, in: UTD/Leary/B19F5.}

During the whole “Tet Offensive”, Air America flight crews performed many inspired deeds, of which only three examples were quoted in\footnote{Air America Log, vol. II, no.2 (February 1968), p.1.} Air America Log:\footnote{See Robbins, Air America, pp.166/7, for further experiences that Air America made during the Tet Offensive.} Captain J. W. David and Captain L. J. Tschetter, flying as co-pilot, were taking a Bell 204B from Ban Me Thuot East (V-12), about 70 miles west-north-west of Nha Trang (V-07), to Nha Trang with three passengers aboard when they were hit by about 13 rounds of small arms fire. Captain Tschetter and one passenger were wounded, and the collective pitch cross tube, the swash plate support assembly, the left hand fuel cell, and the cockpit were hit. Temporary repairs were made at Ban Me Thuot, and the helicopter was returned to Nha Trang. At another place, the Customer was praiseworthy of the bravery and the judgment of an Air America Bell 204B pilot who picked up a badly wounded Embassy man with the instructions to fly him to Saigon for treatment. En route, the pilot saw that the man was too severely hurt to survive the length of time it would take to get him to Saigon, so the pilot landed at the first site where medical treatment was available, thereby saving the man’s life, according to the customer. The customer also requested Air America to operate an evacuation flight to Dalat (V-08) in the Central Highlands during the height of the “Tet Offensive”. Captain C. A. Winston flew a Bell 204B to Dalat and landed on the only spot available – a soccer field in the downtown area where the fighting was heaviest; he brought out seven evacuees. A few days later the flight to the Dalat soccer field was repeated, this time evacuating four customer personnel.\footnote{See CIA document at: \url{http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/15/c05266356.pdf}.}

MACV commended Air America for their heroic deeds during the Tet Offensive,\footnote{See CIA document at: \url{http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/15/c05278300.pdf}.} as did CORDS for Air America’s support to the National Police in February 68.\footnote{Interview given by former Air America pilot Brian Johnson on Monte Markham’s video tape The CIA’s secret airline at 37 minutes.} And so, even after Air America had returned to everyday routine, at least one thing changed in operations in South Vietnam: Initially, Air America’s helicopter flying in South Vietnam was mainly administrative work, but after the Tet offensive, Air America helicopters were heavily used in the Delta area for medevac work, that is for evacuating Americans who had been overrun by the enemy and for evacuating wounded – Americans, Vietnamese, Customers and Viet Cong alike.\footnote{Status of aircraft as of 1 May 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2.}

7) Covert operations, 1962-1969:

On the clandestine side, Air America’s Saigon based fleet also carried CIA case officers into North Vietnam, mostly using Helio Couriers, which could land on roads and wait while their CIA passengers snooped around, and then bring back the same people or some “infol”, as were called those spies that were taken in. This type of use may perhaps explain why the two Helio Couriers assigned to contract AF49(604)-4395 on 25 November 67 for use out of Saigon had Laotian registrations (XW-PBS and XW-PBT), instead of the Taiwanese registrations used by all the other Helio Couriers based at Saigon;\footnote{Interview given by former Air America pilot Brian Johnson on Monte Markham’s video tape The CIA’s secret airline at 37 minutes.} For, this contract between Air America and the US Air Force also included the task to carry around CIA case officers, and for Laotian registered aircraft it was perhaps easier to retreat behind the Laotian border, if necessary. Robbins\footnote{Robbins, Air America, p.155.} reports that one pilot flying a Beech Volpar into North
Vietnam was chased out of the country by Russian MiGs and could save himself only by diving blindly thru a cloud into a valley and then cross the border under the cover of clouds.

8) Air America South Vietnam in the late sixties: overall situation, accomplishments

This routine is well described by the portraits of several Air America stations in South Vietnam that were published in the *Air America Log*. The oldest of these stations was, of course, Air America’s base at Saigon’s Tan Son Nhut airport. In mid-1969, R. F. McGrath, AABM (Administrative Assistant to Base Manager) at Saigon, gives the following picture:245 “In Vietnam, as in other Southeast Asia countries, AAM performs its mission by flying to countless airstrips – many in remote areas and nearly all of them devoid of refuelling, maintenance or cargo-handling facilities – let alone paved runways. And Air America operates, not on a fixed timetable, but on schedules devised and revised by the customer – often only one day ahead of time. At Saigon, Air America uses nine different types of aircraft to meet its schedules – eight kinds of single- and twin-engine fixed-wing planes plus Bell 204B helicopters. The success of such an operation is largely a matter of flexibility; and flexibility is the title of AAM’s Saigon Story. The effectiveness of the Air America / Republic

(Air America Log, vol. III, no.5, 1969, p.4)

of Vietnam effort is determined by its adaptability to sudden, substantial changes, customer requirements, and even such awkward necessities as avoiding the Viet Cong just to get to and from work – as happened during the 1968 Tet offensive. To do all this – while at the same time growing as rapidly as AAM/RVN has grown – is no small feat. Until late 1964, AAM/RVN was a very small operation – hardly more than an itinerant Dornier, Piper of Beechcraft making an occasional flight to or from Tan Son Nhut Airport. Suddenly, for the past three years, AAM/RVN became the Company’s largest integrated flying operation – one which is presently contributing well over one-third of its total aggregate flying hours and is operating some 60 aircraft. Taking January, 1965 as a starting point, Saigon doubled its monthly flying hours within ten months, then redoubled them during the next eight months. Daily aircraft departures doubled within 16 months, stepping up in frequency by another third during the next three months. Cargo traffic growth was logarithmic. Altogether, in flying hours, flights, cargo tonnage, passengers, aircraft, personnel and in any other measure, Saigon – which peaked in late 1967 – is now about five times as big as it was in January, 1965.

Air America Helio Courier B-875 over South Vietnam in 1968
(UTD/Bays/slide no. 229)

Air America’s Passenger Terminal Building at Tan Son Nhut Airport
But there is more to growing up than sheer increase in size; maturity is a matter of self-sufficiency. For the past year or so, Saigon and its sub-bases – Da Nang, Nha Trang and recently Can Tho – have been busily curing their once-painful growing pains: cutting some costs, avoiding others, consolidating, investing modest sums now to save more later on, and stepping up efficiently wherever possible. Examples are:

- Since early 1968 – after a brief interruption by the wrenching Tet crisis – the expensive ferrying of aircraft to Tainan, Vientiane, Bangkok and Udorn for periodic No. 4 and most of the No. 3 maintenance services has been cut from an average of 22 monthly round-trip flights to only seven.
- Machine shop work, magnaflux and x-ray inspection, and weight & balance determination – all formerly done by other organizations, have become in-house functions.
- Supply, now with six times its former space, is less dependent upon instant reaction to its umbilical pipeline from Tainan.
- General maintenance, thanks to such new facilities as enlarged carpentry and auto maintenance shops, no longer farms out its work.
- What was once called a “Mess Hall” is now a bigger, better-equipped, and more appropriately named “Employee Cafeteria” featuring many Oriental and Western menus for personnel of eight different nationalities.
- Saigon’s recently installed Link trainer has substantially reduced expensive instrument flight training time and has improved check ride performance.

Big strides have been taken in the overall training effort among AAM’s ground employees, particularly among hundreds of Vietnamese. Not too long ago, Saigon’s Technical Training Department consisted of one American holding instruction interviews with approximately ten Vietnamese or TCN employees, three or four at a time, in a 12’ by 16’ office totally devoid of training aids. Now Air America has adequately staffed, generously equipped and well-coordinated programs which provide 20 daily classroom hours for employee trainees of all nationalities – especially Vietnamese – in courses ranging from elementary subjects like aircraft cleaning and ramp safety to advanced Airframe & Powerplant courses, including the Federal Aviation Administration’s examinations required for A&P licensing.

But perhaps the most important accomplishment of all – certainly one of incalculable and lasting benefit – has been the steady upgrading of hundreds of Vietnamese in several job categories: Utility Woman and Utility Man to Mechanic III, to Mechanic II, to Mechanic I, to Leadman; Traffic Agent to Traffic Representative A; Air Freight Dispatcher to Supervisor / AFD; Driver to Dispatcher, to Supervisor / GTD; Artisan to Engineer II; Leadman to Construction Forman; Operations Dispatcher II to Assistant Chief Crew Scheduling; Accounting Representative to Senior Accountant; Investigator to Security Supervisor; and so on. Among Vietnamese executives at AAM’s SGN Base are: Mr. Vu Quang Van, General Affairs Manager and Mr. Nguyen Van Bo, Assistant Personnel Manager. Indeed, this continuing increase in Vietnamese up-grading, which during the past 18 months, has helped to raise the percentage of Vietnamese Air America employees from 48.2% of total personnel to still-growing 52.5%, points up the fact that Air America is in Vietnam (and other Oriental countries) for reasons even more basic than its immediate contractual mission.”

This success is well illustrated by a number of technical improvements that were invented by Air America’s Saigon personnel: Probably in 1967, Saigon PMD Leadman Oscar V. Bernardo – thru his own initiative – developed an inexpensive (total costs in parts and labor: about $ 58.80) tail dolly for Bell 204Bs to simplify and speed to wing the helicopters around the base ramp and into hangers. Before that invention, it took up to six men to support the tail stinger on their shoulders while two men stood on the forward ends of the skids and still another man

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drove a tug to slowly tow the helicopter. With jack-wheels attached to the skids and the new dolly under the tail, one man was could tow the Bell 204B.\textsuperscript{247}

Towing an Air America Bell 204B at Saigon before and after Oscar V. Bernardo’s invention (\textit{Air America Log}, vol. I, no.1, Nov.1967, p.1)

Another invention made in the late sixties by mechanics assigned to Air America’s Saigon base was a portable engine hoist. As Boyd D. Mesecher, Manager Technical Services Saigon, pointed out: “Out-station recovery of aircraft requiring engine changes has always presented somewhat of a problem when it comes to what to use for lifting the heavy powerplants. Until now, we had to disassemble one of the big ‘A’ frame hoists at Saigon, load it in a large cargo-type aircraft and fly it to the grounded plane. There, the hoist had to be reassembled. One of our more senior maintenance men, AMD Superintendent F. G. Vizcarra, reviewed the problem on his own initiative and designed an engine hoist for turbine-powered planes using a portion of a helicopter engine hoist that had been borrowed on a long term basis. Vizcarra’s new, knock-down hoist can be quickly disassembled and transported to a disabled aircraft using the smallest plane we operate. This has improved our safety factor in handling engine changes as well as reduced our shipping costs. The cost for the new hoist was slightly under US $ 50.00.”\textsuperscript{248}

\textsuperscript{248} Boyd D. Mesecher, “Vizcarra’s hoist”, in: \textit{Air America Log}, vol. II, no.1, Jan. 1968, p.3.
At about the same time, that is in late 1967, another group of employees of Air America Saigon’s Regional Maintenance Department, members of Technical Training Airframe Class 67-1A, were awarded Certificates of Completion after an intensive 12-week review of all subjects leading to a US FAA Airframe License. Finally, in late 1968, Air America Saigon’s PMD Leadman 1c Oscar V. Bernardo – the man who had already invented a tail dolly for Air America’s Bell 204Bs to simplify towing them on the ground – invented another time/labor saving machine, a pair of tire bead breakers. These machines are “hydraulically-operated presses which allow one man to break aircraft tire beads away from wheel rims quickly, safely and effortlessly. He can, in minutes, perform a job that previously required hours of hard work, determination and perseverance plus hammers, crow bars and a lot of sweat. The larger machine […] can break tire beads for the Curtiss C-46 and for the Douglas C-47, DC-4 and DC-6; time consumed is approximately 20 minutes per operation. The machine took 68 man/hours to build and cost US $ 78.00. […] The smaller machine […] can break tire beads of the following planes: Helio Courier, Pilatus Porter, Dornier DO-28, Beech C-45 and de Havilland Caribou DHC-4. It can get the job done in five minutes flat. The machine took 42 man/hours to build and cost US $ 50.00.”

In 1969, Air America’s Technical Training Department also promoted more South Vietnamese nationals: So, Mr.

Trieu Van Hanh, another RMD Leadman 1c, passed exhaustive United States Federal Aviation Administration examinations to become Air America’s first Vietnamese FAA-licensed mechanic. And also in 1969, after 3 weeks of training, three Vietnamese women laborers – Miss Le Thi Thoi, Miss Tran Thi Huong, and Miss Tran Thi Phinh – were upgraded to Mechanics 3c at Air America’s Saigon Base.  

During the second half of the sixties personnel of Air America South Vietnam also received several commendations: On 17 November 66, Air America C-46 B-156 carried 35 employees of the South Vietnamese Ministry of Revolutionary Development under the provisions of contract AF49(604)-4395. Upon landing at Tam Ky (V-40), about 340 miles north of Saigon, that day, B-156 received heavy ground fire on final approach so that the aircraft was on fire when it touched down. Although the left main landing gear collapsed on touch down, the crew consisting of Captain A. P. Goodkin, First Officer H. W. Wang, and AFD Nguyen Dinh Mai managed to bring their C-46 in for a successful landing, resulting in only minor injuries received by 7 Vietnamese passengers and 1 American passenger. For their professional airmanship, skill and heroism that saved the lives of all people on board, the crew received the Republic of Vietnam’s Gallantry Medal with Bronze Star.  

Air America C-46 “156” (without the nationality prefix “B-”) at Vientiane in the mid-sixties (UTD/Hickler/B29)  

Air America C-46 B-156 after its crash-landing on 17 November 66 (with kind permission from Ward S. Reimer)  

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The crew of C-46 B-156 – F/O Wang, Captain Goodkin, and AFD Mai from left to right – wearing their medals (Air America Log, vol. I, no.1, Nov. 1967, pp.4-5)

Other commendations were awarded to crews of Air America South Vietnam for flying US Government officials out of dangerous situations. On 14 December 67, for example, Captain James W. Davis, Captain Lawrence G. Stadulis, and Flight Mechanic C. W. Kelley received that honor from US Senator Charles H. Percy for having flown him and his wife out of Dak Son, South Vietnam, which at that time was under enemy fire.

Air America Log, vol. II, no.1, January 1968, p.3
Finally, on 17 July 1969, Joseph H. Harmon, Senior Advisor on Tax Administration to the Government of South Vietnam, thanked Air America for the excellent service provided over several years:


But Air America’s operations in South Vietnam were not all based at Saigon’s Tan Son Nhut airport. Since the mid-sixties, Air America also had several outside stations in South Vietnam, the first of which was Danang. Although Air America operated out of Danang since 1963, it became an official Air America station only in July 1965. This is why, in November 67, Air America’s Danang Station Chief Gil Stafford could say: “DaNang – beginning its third official year – continues to grow in station activity and personnel, outstripping many of the older, more established stations. Situated in an ideal location for a Company service stop, DaNang handles almost all AAM Southeast Asia aircraft at one time or another and is familiar to most flight crews. DaNang is fortunate in having some sharp talent and personalities among its US supervisors in the persons of Jack Burton and Harry Miller of RMD, Bob Erkens and Larry Weintraub of FOD, and Fred Donner and George Herring of TFC. Jack, Bob and Fred can be considered old-timers at DNG, while the others have been with us less than a year. Current station personnel complement consists of 48 Vietnamese, 16 Chinese VN citizens, 5 Chinese, 14 Filipinos, and 7 Americans.”253 In mid-68, Gil Stafford, Air America’s former station chief at Danang, gave the following picture: “Air America’s Da Nang Station started in July, 1965; there were no buildings worthy of the name, no real estate, no nothing – but hard work. The whole operation began in an 8 x 15 foot wooden shack sitting on some sand

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near a runway. Total personnel were: three mechanics, one laborer and SZ Gil Stafford. We moved into our present home – the administration building and warehouse – in November, 1966. A nose hangar was added in the Fall of 1967 and the aircraft parking was paved in the Spring of 1968. Future plans call for extending the nose hangar and erecting a building along one side of the hangar to house Technical Services’ shops and offices. The planned paving of a strip between the parking area and the nose hangar will be completed shortly. Air America personnel at Da Nang Station have grown from its original five persons to about 136 employees. Nationality breakdown is as follows: 86 South Vietnamese, 29 Filipinos, 13 Chinese and 8 Americans. Types of aircraft handled by Da Nang include: Helio Couriers; Pilatus Porters; Twin Beechs, C-45s and Volpars; C-46s; C-47s and some Bell 204B helicopters. Da Nang averages about 8 RON aircraft per night. The station operates two hostels in downtown Da Nang for RON crews and visitors; they average some 20-25 people a night. Approximate monthly handling figures for DNG are: Transit aircraft: 650-900; Passengers: 2,400; Freight: 3-million pounds. Da Nang’s current Station Manager is Dan Lawson, a six-year veteran with Air America at many stations.”

Among the missions flown in Military Region I for the US Embassy, that is for the CIA, were airfield reconnaissance flights,255 transporting China Beach based Underwater Demolition Teams (SEAL) in the Danang area as well as supporting SEAL operations and inserting SEAL teams with Air America helicopters,256 damage assessment flights,257 flying around CIA personnel who are visiting Montagnard villages, distributing food and supplies to those Montagnards, and transporting PRU units and their weapons and ammunition,258 but also transporting food.259 Some of Air America’s Bell 204Bs working for the Agency in Military Region I were based at Hue.260 One of the strangest things ever flown in a C-47 was a Volkswagen that an Air America C-47 had to carry from Danang to Saigon by order of the US Embassy; as the delivery was extremely urgent, the C-47 probably was Air America’s stand-by aircraft stationed at Danang.261

Nha Trang was Air America’s second outside station in South Vietnam. In November 67, Raymond J. Sanford of Air America’s Nha Trang Station noted: “From its inception on April 15, 1966, the Nha Trang station has seen remarkable progress. In 13 months it has grown from nothing to its present operation, which includes a nearly completed office building and a black-top ramp, which has considerably enhanced the station’s capabilities. Refuelling, long a problem at Nha Trang, is soon to become routine. New fuel pits, installed on the flight line, will speed aircraft turnaround times and cut man-hours. Within a week we should see the completion of an air-conditioned Traffic area and passenger lounge, which will eliminate considerable confusion and congestion at flight show times. The month brought two new additions to the Nha Trang staff: Radio Operator L. Liu and Operations Manager Bill Love. Jerry Griffis, our Chief Mechanic, will soon depart for the States on vacation. Carl Fields will assume his duties while he is gone. One short year ago, save for a few transiting aircraft, there was no evidence of Air America at Nha Trang. The following figures, which are still rising, testify to its rapid growth; figures are for May, 1967:

255 See the airfield reconnaissance flight to Kam Duc described in Harnage, A thousand faces, pp.2-5.
257 From his Air America Porter, Harnage (A thousand faces, p.24) took photos of the US Navy shooting at a Viet Cong convoy.
258 Harnage, A thousand faces, pp.25-27; “The PRU members are recruited from villages within the Province, trained, paid, and supported by the agency and are often referred as the CIA’s Secret Army. […] The PRU is an integral part of the intelligence community and an elite fighting force” (p.26). “Numerous cases of Australian hand grenades were […] issued to the province PRU teams” (p.33).
259 Harnage, A thousand faces, p.34.
260 Harnage, A thousand faces, p.32.
261 Harnage, A thousand faces, pp.43-46.
1. Passengers handled – over 5,000.
2. 1-1/4 millions pounds of cargo loaded and offloaded.
3. 268 RON A/C
4. 1,170 hours flight time for RON A/C
5. 1,890 arrivals and departures.

As early as 5 December 1966, Air America had Bell 204B N1304X based at Can Tho (V-17). Between 5 and 10 December 66, Air America Captain French N. Smith used this bird out of Can Tho for med-evac flights, for evacuating dead people, and for an infiltration flight into Cambodia that resulted in 5 casualties. On 9 April 67, French Smith was back to Can Tho again, first operating Bell 204B N1307X, then returning to Saigon on 10 April, from where he ferried N1304X to Can Tho on 13 April and flew it out of Can Tho until 17 April, among others on night med-evac flights. In June 67, he was at Can Tho again, this time using locally based Bell 204B N8535F between 2 and 6 June. Between 13 and 19 August 67, Smith was again at Can Tho, using Bell 204B N8514F on med-evac missions, but also for flying around a TV team that was taking movie pictures. The aircraft based at Can Tho changed from time to time, and so between 10 and 13 January 68 it was Bell 204B N1303X that Smith used for med-evac and other flights. On 11 January 68, this Air America bird was joined at Can Tho by Bell 204B N8514F and by Porter N185K. So it can be assumed that since at least late 1966, Air America had always based some aircraft down at Can Tho. But Can Tho became an official Air America station only on 10 January 1969.

There was also a center of Air America operations at Pleiku (V-04), but this got the status of an official Air America Station only very late. As could be seen above, a lot of flights coming from Saigon ended there before returning to Saigon. There was also a maintenance facility. The only Air America employees known to have been stationed at Pleiku were Albert S. Licup (Ground Handling) and Ramon B. Bautista (Storekeeper I in December 74).