1962

Four US/Air America employees wounded by hostile fire in 1962: Gardner (Jan. 24), Kenstler (Feb. 28), DeLaurentis (Mar. 22), and Swain (Nov. 27)]

[Udorn report: The years 1962-64 marked a gradual increase in facilities and aircraft maintenance operations at Udorn. Improvements totalled $272,000 and included the expansion of Hangars 1 and 2, construction of a supply building, water plant and storage, aircraft parking ramp, recreation club, and electrical power distribution system. Flying decreased between late 1962 and September 1963. Seven L-20 Beavers were assigned to Udorn for seven months in 1962. Later in 1962, three Helios were assigned. UH-1Hs flew a total of 22,696 hours in 1962, averaging (per aircraft) 107 hours a month. No aircraft lost in 1962; six suffered major damage.

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Dave Hickler: In 1964-65, Hickler was CIA base chief; he was replaced by Whitey Whitehurst. Earl E. Jones was CIA Air Operations, 1964-66 (official title: deputy chief, Air Support Branch, USAID). He was assisted by Lyle H. Brown, an ex-smoke jumper. Hickler dealt mainly with Jones. He saw the CIA base chief only for the most important matters. The CIA often dealt directly with the chief pilot (Fred Walker; later, Jim Rhyne). He had a lot of problems with Jones. At one point, Jones told Hickler to follow orders "or else."
January 1962

Special Forces receive authorization to train Kha in southern Laos.

Stanton: Actually, training had begun in December 1961 when LTC Arthur D. Simons obtained money and supplies from CIA. Royal Lao government was reluctant to support the program. By May 1962, 12 Kha Auto Defense de Choc units had been formed and Simons was ready to move against the Ho Chi Minh. However, on June 1 MAAG withdrew support as the program was too independent of Royal government. The promising program had to be abandoned in the fall.

January 1962

Joseph W. Hazen arrived in TPE at the end of October 1961. He recalls his visit to Rousselot’s office. Rousselot looked at his logbooks and asked, "Any combat time?" Hazen replied: "No, but I’ve been practicing for four years." Rousselot smiled, then asked him if he would like to go to Tainan to fly B-26s. Hazen test flew B-26s coming out of IRAN program from November 17 to 29. (He returned briefly to B-26s in February 1964. After ground school with Truman Barnes, he flew 888, the only dual-control B-26. Plans were to ferry the airplanes to the Congo, but Hazen did not go on the ferry flight. He later heard that Russ Kreig had cracked up an airplane enroute.)

After the stint at Tainan, Rousselot offered him a choice between Tachikawa as a DC-6 copilot or light planes in Southeast Asia. Having enjoyed his previous stay in Japan, he opted for Tachikawa. Shortly after this, he ran into Fred Riley at the MAAG Club. Riley, who was in town to get his Chinese ATR, said that he could earn a lot more money in Southeast Asia. Hazen told Rousselot that he would like to change his mind about the assignment. Rousselot said that he had made a good choice.

(Riley was right: as copilot at Tachikawa, he would have made $650 a month. As a captain in Southeast Asia, he made $1050 a month, plus $10 a hour for project pay (5 minutes from VTE) and $10 and hour for overtime. He averaged $3000 a month. His top month was 174 hours - "too much flying.")

Hazen arrived in VTE in December 1961. After a familiarization flight with Bob Smith on December 12, he spent the next week with Ron Sutphin, learning the country and airstrips. He flew 24 hours between December 13 and 20, then checked out as captain on December 21.

Other Helio pilots included Don Coker [10/10/61] and Bob Smith [4/3/61]. Ed Dearborn came at about the same time. Morris Kentsler [1/2/62] and Don Coney [4/3/62] arrived shortly thereafter. It was pretty much one airplane per pilot, and you didn’t fly when your plane was out of service.
At first, he lived in the "Hello House." The "Customer House" was across the street. Later, he shared a house with Dearborn and Rentsler near the Lycee, three doors away from the North Vietnamese embassy. Dearborn kept a Thompson submachine gun in his bedroom. Hazen was friendly with Coney, Don Campbell, and Don Coker ("an excellent Hello pilot"). He also became a drinking buddy of Tony Po. He recalls when Po was wounded. He landed with Crafts, got out of the helicopter, and stopped on a "Bouncing Betty" mine. Po was hit in the chest; Crafts took some shrapnel. He remembers visiting their room in the Seventh Day Adventist Hospital in Bangkok. He had brought a bottle of Scotch, but it wasn't needed: Tony had a case under his bed.

There were no uniforms at first. Most pilots had clothes made at Jack & Johny, the Indian tailors in VTE. Later, a grey uniform was introduced, complete with an Australian bush hat and black jump boots. Madison even wanted the pilots to wear ascots, but that idea was dropped. Hazen early purchased a 24-karat gold bracelet (with his name on one side and blood type on the other) from the Hanoi Bijou, down the street from the Constellation Hotel. (The 24-karat bracelet proved too soft and he later replaced it with an 18-karat gold one. Ed Dearborn may have been the first to buy one. No one thought of it as a survival item.) A gold Rolex, purchased in Hong Kong, came a short time later.

The customer had a storage shed, from which the pilots could select weapons. Hazen picked up a .38 pistol and folding stock carbine. The customer also provided medical kits. The company later put out a survival kit that had to be checked out for each flight, but most pilots had their personal kits. Hazen kept his weapons in his kit. There was not problem: if they didn't see it, they didn't care.

"Clancy," [Clarence Christ Mathky - who had a fantastic memory (Jack Shirley)] a retired army major, was the customer ramp man at VTE. He would make the daily assignments. Hazen mainly flew out of Pha Khao (LS-14) at first. He would pick up a load, remove the left side door of the Hello, board a Lao kicker (who had been trained to drop on the pilot's command), and make drops in outlying areas. He usually carried rice, fresh meat, and ammunition. Vang Pao would send small teams out in the countryside. They would report back by radio every evening, giving their location. VP ("a hellava man" "fearless") would brief pilots on drop locations. He often came along himself and acted as kicker. He had a few favored pilot, of which Hazen was one.

The 12-hour rule generally was taken seriously by the pilots, although it usually took one incident to point out the problems of flying with a hangover. Hazen's lesson came when he flew a generator to a movie projector to Ban Na (LS-15) for a wedding for one of Van Pao's nephews. Hazen
joined the celebration. Early the next morning, VP wanted to be flown to VTE. Fortunately, VP liked to fly and could hold heading and altitude. He flew the airplane while Hazen vomited out the side window. "You only did it once."

Hazen remained with the STOL program until April 1966. He was chief pilot from mid-1964 to mid-1965. He had about 15-20 pilots under him. He reported to Fred Walker, who gave him a free hand to run the program. Walker once complained that he was not checking out enough pilots in the Helio, but Hazen would not release pilots he considered dangerous. Not everyone was suited for the Helio: "You either had it or you didn't with the Helio." Hazen also flew the Dornier, Caribou, and (briefly) the Porter and Cessna 185.

January 4, 1962

Robert Lewis: He was flying out of Romeo (Takhli) on O-8 contract as copilot on C-46 with John Anastakes [Lewis was with AAM from October 1961 to April 1962]. They had palletized cargo for airdrop at three locations on the northernmost borders of Laos. On the final drop of the day, the kicker ("Shep") saw a snake crawl into the heating duct just before the pallet was shoved out the door. Heading back to Takhli, Shep came up to front and casually mentioned about the snake. The heating duct ends up in the cockpit overhead. Just at dusk, Lewis notice an undulating movement in the duct cover and slapped at it with his clipboard. They then climbed to 15,000 feet in hoped to depriving the snake of oxygen and making it sleepy. When they got close to Takhli, they began to make a letdown in the dark. Just as Lewis reached for his flight bag, something fell across his arm. "I was petrified! I moved my eyes only and saw the wire connecting my headset to the jack box was resting on my arm." Stack informed Tower about the snake. After they landed, both pilots "ran like hell" out the back door. Some airmen drove up and threw a smoke (sulphur) grenade into the ship and closed the cargo door except for three inches. About twenty minutes later, a Krate crawled out.

Re Takhli: "I liked the place." Customer "very selective" about who flew out of there on the O-8 contract. Crews had single rooms with bath and showers, comfortable beds, and no bugs. Mess sergeant named Birdsong who was always ready to coop up whatever you desired no matter what time of day or night.

January 19, 1962

Eckholdt is at Clark AFB to train on C-123Bs. On February 2, Air America crews flew five C-123s to Takhli. They were "bailed" airplanes, on loan from the USAF, and bearing "x" tail number designations. "It was one of the better airplanes." With self-sealing tanks, the risks from ground fire were reduced. [Eckholdt's logbook records
numerous airdrops with the C-123 between May 3 and June 19, 1962.] Eckholdt recalls doing a lot of flying on C-46/C-123s during the first half of 1962. Crew often flew an entire month without a break, piling up 225-250 hours. Officials in Air America later limited flight hours to 175. However, the customer could always order additional missions beyond this figure when special flights were required. Most of the flights during this period involved rice drops to the Hmong.

John Lee: Lee was approached by Aderholt and asked for his recommendation on a replacement for the C-46s and C-47s. Lee recommended the C-123. This was a new airplane and not many people knew about it, but Lee had tried to sell it to the Saudi Air Force. As this was what Aderholt had in mind, he recruited Lee for the project. In January 1962, Lee Walker, Don Campbell, and Ed Eckholdt went to Clark AFB to evaluate the C-123. They spent five days at Clark, then returned to Bangkok and made a favorable report to Aderholt. Early in February, Air America acquired its first three airplanes. Initially, they were based at Takhilli. After three weeks of training, Lee flew the first mission on February 23: Takhilli to VTE, pick up rice, fly two airdrops, then back to Takhilli. At this time, overnight stays at VTE were not permitted. This set the pattern for the next few months.

Lee mainly dropped rice. The C-123 carried 12,000 pounds of double-bagged rice on eight pallets. The airplane had double tracks. If the DZ was tight or under fire, the load could be dropped in one pass. "It was quite a thrill when that load went out of the airplane." Lee found that 600 feet was the best altitude for rice drops, balancing roll vs. impact. Kickers would remove all tiedowns when approaching the DZ. The load would be held by a single 15,000-pound-test strap. The pilot had to be sure to hold the pressure firm on the strap as he counted down. Dropping rice was like throwing darts. You had to make an eyeball estimate. At the proper moment, you would yell "Go" and ring the bell; the copilot would add power as Lee hauled back on the yoke. The airplane would pitch up momentarily, and the kicker would cut the strap with a knife. The load would be flown out. The process took about eight seconds. This procedure was different from that used by the USAF, which tended to dribble the load out all over the countryside; Air America procedure kept a tight DZ.

Dropping loads by parachute (barrels of fuel and arms) required a different technique. Lee usually would drop one barrel to test for wind drift. Also, a roll of toilet paper tossed out the windown provided good information on the wind. After making the necessary corrections for wing, he would drop the rest of the load.
The C-123 was a good airplane for the task. It had a dry wing, with fuel stored in the nacelle behind the engine in self-sealing tanks. It could—and did—absorb small arms hits without causing too much damage. If necessary to crash land, the fuel could be jettisoned quickly, permitting the airplane to crash dry, avoiding fire. It was a little underpowered, but this was remedied by adding jets on the K model (which Lee never flew).

The C-123 was "Aderholt's pet," and he loved to show off its capability. Lee recalls approaching VTE one day when Aderholt came up on the radio and asked him to do a maximum performance landing on the overrun of the old runway. When Lee complained about getting the airplane dirty, Aderholt told him not to worry: he would wash it. Lee stopped the 123 in a cloud of dust in 8-900 feet, to the delight of Aderholt, who had a group of VIPs from Washington with him.

Lee recalls one mission to get a bulldozer to Pop Buell at Sam Thong. An attempt was made to drop it, due to the short strip at LS-20. Don Campbell flew the mission. Normally, it would take 1,500 feet for the chute to deploy properly on a heavy drop, but the weather was bad, with a ceiling of about 800 feet. Under pressure from Aderholt, Campbell dropped; but the parachutes did not deploy properly and the bulldozer bored a hole in the ground. Aderholt then wanted to land a bulldozer. The strip was 1,200 feet long but the elevation was 4,000 feet, a marginal situation for a 123. Fred Walker was selected to make the landing, but after his training was completed, he was called to Taipei. He turned the job over to Lee. Lee loaded the bulldozer, then took the airplane up to 5000 feet and simulated a landing at 4000 feet, flying the airplane on the edge of a stall (on the stick shaker). He found that he could fly at about 105 knots. He then landed back at VTE and tested the reverse and brakes with the load. He and copilot Andy Anderson then proceeded to Sam Thong. There was considerable excitement on the ground as word was passed that "Big Bird is coming in." The runway was not quite level. Lee added power and missed the end, but he managed to stop just short of the end (which dropped off sharply).

Lee flew three "black" flights, dropping agents (Vietnamese) into the Dien Bien Phu area on 16 April 1962, 13 December 1962, and 31 March 1963. He reported to Takhli two or three days before the mission and was briefed by CIA case officers. The crew was isolated, with no outside contact. They studied the routing, as the plane was sanitized. They flew the mission at low level (800 feet) on moonlite nights, navigating by dead reckoning. There was no change in engine power during drops less location be revealed. There was no ground drop single. The agents radioed an "OK" message following the drop. There was no SAR or E&E procedure: "You were on your own." Lee received
special pay (cash) for the missions but the money did not balance out the time lost from regular flights, as it took five to six days for one of these missions (including debriefing). Campbell, Eckholdt, and Sutphin also flew black flights. [Lee left in August 1963.]

January 24, 1962
Pilot D.W. Gardner wounded by hostile fire.
[Circumstances ?]

January - November 1962
Ed Dearborn was hired in November 1961 and sent to Laos for the Helio program. Other Helio pilots when he arrived included Malaberg [4/61], Coker [10/61], and R. C. Smith [4/61]. Hazen was hired about the same time. Later pilots included Wiren [6/62], Kentsler [1/62], and Coney [4/62]. Bill Andresevic was chief pilot. Ron Sutphin was in charge of training. Sue was a skinny little guy with fuzz on his chin. He wore his hat at a 30 degree angle and looked like something out of "Our Gang." Coker and Malaberg were excellent Helio pilots. R.C. Smith and Andresevic, on the other hand, nearly destroyed the Helio fleet, with R.C. Smith holding the record for wrecking Helios.

Dearborn made a lot of airdrops (Sutphin taught him the procedure). He also carried sick and wounded. He spent a lot of time surveying Helio strips. The customer would point out a desirable location, then Dearborn would go in and measure it, record the altitude, and compass heading. One strip did not have a name, so he called it Ban Beecher (LS-100) after his grandfather. Aderholt was not around at this time. During the winter of 1961-62, Aderholt flew 555 into trees at the end of a strip; he said that he lost power, but Dearborn believes that he was overloaded.

At first, Bill Lair or Pat Landry would give assignment. Later, Clancy [Clarence Christ Mathky] was brought in run air operations; he did a good job.

Dearborn did a lot of flying for Vang Pao: "The most effective person we had out there." The Mee did most of the fighting and took most of the casualties.

Pilots were hired specially to fly the Beavers, and they remained apart from the other STOL pilots. There was a big flap about some pilots padding their log books. Most were fired. He recalls a conversation with Doole that took place during the second half of 1963. Doole had a model of a Beaver in his office, and he asked Dearborn his opinion of it. Dearborn was negative: it was not a true STOL airplane and could not operate out of the smaller Helio strips. Also, the fuel tanks were located in the bottom of the aircraft and were a fire hazard in crashes. In fact, this is what happened with Beale: his fuel tanks had been ripped out. Doole seemed to share his views. Dearborn transferred to Danang in November 1962 to fly the Caribou in support of
Special Forces. [He later went to the Congo in December 1963.]

February 4, 1962:
C-46 B-916 shot down near Xiang Khouang during airdrop.
Killed: Herbert S. Strouss, Howard F. Heinrich, and H. C. Lee; three AFSs jumped and survived.

February 1962
Robert Herald hired by Air America.

Herald: Herald graduated from Oklahoma State-Stillwater in 1959 as a geology major (he wrestled in college). With few jobs available, he went with the Forest Service (he had worked summers with the Forest Service as a smoke jumper since high school). The Forest Service maintained a small staff throughout the year who worked on research and development, then expanded for the summer. Herald was trained in parachuting, parachute delivery, and riggings. The Forest Service did a lot of freefall and parachute delivery out of C-46s and C-47s.

Herald knew a lot of Forest Service people who were working in the Far East, including Thomas ("Shep") Johnson, Pete Peterson, David W. Bevin, and Roland "Big Andy" Anderson. When he expressed interest, he was contacted by Air America and brought to Washington for an interview. Red Dawson told him that previous kickers had been customer-employed but that they wanted to switch over. Herald would be the first to work directly for Air America. He asked if that would be a problem; Herald said that it would not be one.

Herald went out to the Far East in February 1962. After orientation in Taipei, he was assigned to Takhli. The next two AFSs to arrive were Hugh Olson and Russ Green. A short time later, Earl Young showed up. A former captain in the army, Young became too interested in the tactical end of things and did not pay much attention to aerial delivery. He had some problems and soon departed. Herald worked with Thai PHUs (LaDue later worked closely with them). A couple of the original kickers stayed on to organize rigging and configure loads (first Pete Peterson, then Shep Johnson). The C-123s mainly dropped ammo. Sometimes a C-123 would go to Vientaine and work there for awhile, dropping half ammo and half rice. During the truce, the C-123s had to avoid VTE radar lest the CIC become upset. An Air America aircraft would depart VTE for a local flight just as a plane from Takhli was scheduled to arrive. The plane from VTE would head for the border, let down to 500 feet, and trade places with the inbound. The Takhli plane then would advise VTE that it was changing its flight plan and heading north.

In summer 1962, Frank Daly asked Herald if he would fill in for George LaRouche, who was ill. For two months,
Herald ran the drop zones from VTE. He had a big sheet with a list of DZs and how much rice they were to receive each month. He supervised the rigging of rice for C-123s (20-bag pallets), C-46s, C-47s, and Bird & Son PV. He would send the airplanes out each day with a primary and alternate drop zone. He had to watch the weather and schedule airplanes as efficiently as possible. There was a flight watch system using Chinese radio operators, and no FIC.

He was about this time. He was "a kind of a politician," more interested in managerial position than flying (he did not like the danger involved). He was a good choice to head the air freight section, which involved scheduling and reports. Herald later took over the job, but he arranged for a capable assistant so that he could continue flying.

Herald flew several of the "black" flights out of Takhli with John Lee and Al Wilson. They flew without lights in back until the approached the drop zone, then red lights came on. Herald recalls four lines of 16 Vietnamese, dressed in heavy canvas jump suit and helmets with face masks (for protection against trees). They were so heavily laden they could barely wobble. Two lines went straight out the back while two ent out the sides. There were usually two AFSs and two Vietnamese jumpmasters. Sometimes they hesitated, but they always jumped. Hugh Olson also flew a number of these missions.

Herald would select AFS for special missions. Some kickers were more physically and mentally coordinated than others and not only would make the right decision but make it quickly. Tom Greiner, Hugh Olsen, Jack Fogarty, and Gene Hausenfuss were this type. Others, Karl Seethaler for example, would make the correct decision but not as quickly. "I always tried to pick the right kind of guy for a flight."

There was a cash bonus for special missions, with the highest for flights to Tibet and over the Ho Chih Minh Trail. There were only two or three flights to Tibet that Herald recalls. He did not go on any of them but believes that Jack Fogarty went on all.

Thais (sometimes ex-PARUs) and Lao were hired and training from the beginning. They became quite good and early took over the C-46 and C-47s, which did not require much communication. Thais later were placed in charge of drops on the C-123s but never on the C-130s.

Herald's administrative supervision came through Traffic & Sales (Jim Tate, then Art Rodgers, then Stan Huster). The people in Taipei, who did not have a background in parachute delivery, supported him. He also got along well with Fred Walker and Don Teeters.

Herald later attended CIA schools in Virginia and at Marana with Teeters, Abadie, Doc Johnson, Seigrist, and a few others. Virginia was mainly orientation. At Marana, they learned delivery techniques, including reef delay
chutes and the Fulton pickup system. Special people were needed for reef delay drops: Barry Reed, Austin Moon, Lechtman, Hausenfous. Back in the Far East, Air America rigged a C-123 with the Fulton recovery gear and practiced picking up dummies. Herald is not aware of any operational use of the system, although it worked well in practice. Later, the runway was extended to allow C-123s to land, and still later C-130s. Howie Baker floated out of a C-123 over Long Tieng. Some kickers put on the uncomfortable parachute only when they reached the DZ (Herald always wore his). Greiner, who was on the airplane, described how Baker floated all the way from the front of the airplane out the back. (Greiner later was on the airplane that hit a piece of equipment on the runway at Long Tieng).

Discipline was not a major problem. He recalls that he recommended termination for only three people in ten years. One (F.A. Oppel) was for drinking and missing flights; one was for refusing to go on routine flights; and one (an ex-Marine) was because he could not do the simple math problems required to work weight-and-balance. Several kickers were involved in smuggling out of VTE in the mid-60s (gold or dope) and left "on the run": Mick Swift, Asher, M. T. Kontir, Lewis, and Samavosky. They either were involved or knew more about it than they should.

February 1962
C. F. "Rusty" Phillips hired.

Phillips was an ex-college wrestler (Duke) who had been flying for Pan Am for five years when furloughed in 1960. In the summer of 1960, he was running a bar in Miami and working in the Kennedy campaign when he heard about a job in the Congo. He went to Africa with Air Panama in August 1960, flying DC-6s and DC-4s out of Leopoldville. Late in 1961 he fell off a motel balcony and returned to the U.S. for recovery. While he was in Miami around New Year he heard that the U.N. had cancelled the operation in the Congo. He applied for a job with CAT (which was well known among pilots) and was called to Washington for an interview with Doole. Hired, he was sent to Taipei in February 1962.

When Phillips arrived in Taipei, he had an interview with Rousselot. Rousselot offered the job as chief pilot of the Beaver program provided that he shaved off his beard. He was in charge for only a short time. They were trained in Udorn by a de Havilland pilot from Canada. After Beale's accident, he was relieved of his chief pilot's duties. Beale's accident brought a temporary halt to the program. There were some 8 airplanes and about the same number of pilots. Bob Ferguson had good contacts with the military; Phillips held him in low esteem.
The Beavers went on to do a very effective job for the White Star people. He recalls working for Colonel Roth at Savannakhet, Meridith at Pakse, and Harris at VTE. Ben Moore was more or less in charge of the program. The Udorn operation was known as the Mad River Project. Maintenance for the Beavers was excellent. Sometimes they carried kickers, either American or Filipino.

Phillips and Simon were the last two pilots in the program. When it ended, he went to work for Ben Moore as assistant project manager and was in charge of building the club at Udorn. He later transferred to BKK on the 10-2 program; Jack Rife also was there. He returned to Pan American in the mid-1960s.

[Ropka: Doole was behind the Beaver project. In the Air Branch, Ropka fought against it - "We just knew that it wasn’t the airplane" - but Doole insisted. Around this same time, Ropka got money for some twin-engine Dorniers. He offered them to Doole, but Doole was not interested. Ropka gave the money to Brongersma to buy two. Although Dutch could put the airplane into some short fields, it was not really suitable for the job. Dutch ran concurrent elements. There was the Bird Dutch and the Agency Dutch. He had a casual relationship with the Agency.]

February 1962

Colonel Robert C. Roth arrived in Laos in February/March 1962, replacing Ralph Layton as chief military adviser, MR III, with headquarters at Savannakhet. Reuben Tucker (now deceased) was head of MAAG at VTE (later, BKK). His chief of staff was Mac Lemly (USMA graduate). Major Morgan was in charge of White Star units, replacing Bull Simons. Ken Bull (Citadel graduate) was a Pakse. Roth did not have anything to do with the origins of the Beaver program. He became friends with Rusty Phillips. He recalls having breakfast (steak and eggs) with Phillips the morning they left Laos in October 1962.

Roth to WML, 7 May 1991:

"As a member of the US Military Advisory Group, Laos, I served as Senior Advisor to the Forces Armees du Royaume (FAR) in Military Region Three from May to October 1962. My Headquarters was in Savannakhet. My responsibilities did include certain supervisory and coordinating functions related to the advisory, training and logistical efforts at the various levels within my zone. I was not the commander of White Star.

The location of many of our field elements in areas not readily accessible by overland travel, made support by air essential and, due to the nature of the terrain, and other factors, both helicopters and Beaver aircraft were made available to satisfy the requirement. Without this air
support, it is difficult to visualize how the functions of
command, control, coordination, supply and evacuation could
have been effectively executed.

The pilots who flew these missions . . . deserve full
credit for the manner in which they accomplished their
missions. Although faced consistently with the requirement
for flights over the most inhospitable terrain, often a low
level and under adverse weather conditions, and the ever-
present threat of hostile fire, I can recall no instance of
mission failure or loss of aircraft or air personnel. I
have nothing but respect and admiration for their skill,
dedication and courage."

February 2, 1962
Richard W. Elder makes first flight (with Bob Gorman).

Interview with Elder, 5 February 1992: Elder, a former
USAF pilot, was working with Southern Airways in Texas,
training Army pilots, when late in December he got a call
"out of the blue" from Air America, asking if he wanted to
go to SE Asia. Although he knew few details, he readily
agreed. He arrived in January 1962, and was checked out as
captain in March. Abadie was chief pilot and Coble, who did
most of the training, was his assistant. Herb Baker, Viril
Black, and Jerry McEntee show up about this time (they were
short of pilots). Everything was pretty informal; you were
given an aircraft and sent out to work at the customer’s
direction. There were engine and carburetor problems with
the H-34s. The 600-hour overhaul schedule was changed to
300 hours, which solved most of the difficulties. Elmer
Gould was in charge of maintenance, with Aspinwall and
Forney under him. Elder’s wife accompanied him to SE Asia.
She lived in Bangkok for a few months, then moved up to
Udorn.

Wayne Knight, 8/9/92: There was a low level of flying
at this time. He rotated with Weitz at Luang Prabang. Nam
Tha did not really seem all that serious, and he never was
shot at. They dropped drums of napalm from the helicopters
for the army people, but without much result.

Abadie was chief pilot. He rarely flew and was not too
proficient although he gave check rides. He was a good,
tough administrator but not a strong pilot. He seemed more
interested in building runways and hangars than operational
matters. He left pretty early and was assigned to Taipei;
he was replaced by Coble, his deputy. Coble was "very
immature" and was fired in 1964 after a fight with one of
the flight mechanics. Black, who had been assistant to
Coble, also left about this time, and Knight, who had been
doing the checking and training, suddenly became chief
pilot. Ben Moore was uncertain at first whether or not
Knight could do the job and wanted Abadie to return from
Taipei; but Knight really enjoyed the job, put in lots of hours, and won Moore's confidence.

February 3, 1962
Air America memo: "Living Conditions at Udorn." Few hotels; all "sub-standard." Few livable places for dependents. "Married American employees do not feel that they can bring their wives to Udorn at the present time." Snack bar opened on base on November 2, 1961. Only one restaurant in town has screens. "Native hard liquor is almost undrinkable." "Entertainment at Udorn is practically non-existent. The result is that Air America personnel who are single or without their families present, tend to congregate in bars." [Two popular bars were the Jute Box and Snow White, which had a tin roof and dirt floor.]

February 19, 1962
Air America NOTAM: All helicopter crews are instructed to read bulletin board at Udorn for information on style, material, and cost of required uniform. Procurement is responsibility of each individual and will begin as soon as local tailors are able to supply proper material.

February 26, 1962
Paul M. Severson hired by Air America.
Severson had been flying for Williams Brothers in Iran in 1959-61 and had been an Ag pilot, flying a Stearman. When he returned to U.S. in 1961 to obtain an ATR, he applied for a job with Southern Air Transport in Miami. There was nothing open, but he was told to call a number in Washington and contact General Hewitt. After an interview in Washington, he was hired and sent to Southeast Asia for the Beaver program.

The Beavers were put together in Bangkok, then flown to Udorn for training. Ralph Adams was supposed to be the chief pilot. Other pilots were Robert H. Gains [19 February 1962], Flip Perry, Bill Varney, Robert Abrams [25 March 1962], and Bill Beale. Bob Ferguson was the personal pilot of a high ranking USAF officer in VTE and had lots of pull.

As it turned out, the Helios really were more suited for the job. The Beaver cruised at 95 knots and consumed 24 gph. It could carry 1200 pounds with a light load of fuel and 800 pounds with full tanks. It needed 800 to 1000' to land. The Helio consumed 8 gph, could carry as much, and needed much less to land.

There was a general inquiry re padding log books with radio calls compared to log entries. Severson and Gains were cleared and most of the other pilots were fired [Abrams stayed in 1965].

Severson flew Helios from 1963 to 1967, then went to Tachikawa and flew C-47s and Boeing 727. He returned to VTE
in 1970 and flew C-46s and C-123Ks. He went to Vietnam for the end. He now flies with America West.

Severson flew numerous flights on a triangular route from Pakse to Attapeu and Saravane. He worked for a CIA officer named Roy Moffett at Pakse (he was a big game hunter). He flew USAID personnel and supplies, and Lao soldiers. At one point, he carried several loads of PSP from Pakse to Saravane. He flew for Bull Simon (who was there the whole time). He carried White Star personnel, including people who dropped grenades (in jars) on a road junction south of Attapeu.

February 28, 1962
Pilot M.N. Kenstler wounded by hostile fire.

Kenstler, March 20, 1993: Kenstler was en route to Pha Khao with a Lao colonel, flying low under an overcast, when hit by an AK-47 round. The round came up through the floor, grazed his leg, and then fragmented. Kenstler was hit by the shell fragments in his face and chest. There was a lot of blood, and he was worrying about making it back to Vientiane. The wounds proved superficial.

March 1962
Harriman visits Laos; Sullivan flown to PDJ for meeting with Souvanna and Souphanouvong.

c. March/April 1962
Telephone interview with Jerry L. Souders, October 20, 1991

Souders, who had been involved in the transfer of helicopters from HMR 163 to Air America in 1961, resigned from the USMC and joined Air America in January 1962. He remained with them until July 1963.

Souders was involved in the famous shooting incident, which took place around March/April 1962. He was visiting an apartment in Udorn that was shared by Edward B. Subowstoy, an ex-Marine, and two Army pilots. After some drinking, there was an argument about Marine vs. Army marksmanship. An Army pilot pulled out a .25 automatic and fired several shots at the nearest convenient target: a framed picture of the king of Thailand. Ed responded with his .45, placing one shot right between the king’s eyes. The police showed up shortly thereafter and arrested all four. The police wanted to lock them up, but Ben Moore offered to put up one of the helicopters as a bond. He signed over H-U, which was in reality a piece of melted aluminum as a result of an accident. Souders was let off: the police had found him sleeping under the king’s picture, covered with glass, and decided that he had not been involved. The other three
pilots were tried, convicted, and sentenced to seven years. The sentence was suspended. Air America terminated them, and they left the country.

After the truce agreement in October 1963, there was little flying - and lots of drinking. Souders resigned in July 1963 as there seemed to be no future with Air America.

M. D. Alston to WML, April 15, 1993: "Every house in Thailand had a picture of the king and queen. The houseboy had been fired the day before and was returning to get his things when he saw the pictures - and went for the police. At the same time, a fixed-wing pilot named McNulty (called McNasty) was fired in Vientiane for shooting at a fly bother him while trying to sleep - emptied his pistol. Byu the time the other came through the door, he was trying to load his Thompson sub-machine gun. He was flown out on the same plane as the helicopter pilots. In the bar at the club, we all stood on the steps, raised our glasses, and said, 'There go the fastest guns in Southeast Asia.'"

March 11, 1962
Five L-2Os fly in formation from Bangkok to Udorn. Adams/Fairbanks in lead, then Gains/Forney, Varney/Lambson, Severson/Lewis, and Perry/McDonough. The airplanes had been shipped to BRK by military ship, then taken to Don Muang in boxes and put in flying condition by Thai and Chinese mechanics. Severson recalls that the airplanes were Army olive drab paint with military numbers painted over in black. The initial instruction was by Dave Fairbanks of DeHavilland/Canada. Training continued at Udorn. Severson flew 44 hours in training during March.

March 22, 1962
R. L. DeLaurentis wounded by hostile fire.

Telephone interview with Herbert M. Baker, February 8, 1992:

Baker took his discharge from the USMC on Okinawa in January 1962 and immediately joined Air America (he earlier had spoken with Rousselet). He was flying in Laos by the end of the month. Around March/April, Baker was flying out of Luang Prabang to a site on the Mekong River. He was returning a Lao radio operator to his unit along with some supplies. Ed Subowsty was in a second helicopter. When he reached the village, things "smelled bad." He asked Subowsty to hold clear while he went down to take a look. People in the correct uniforms came out and took position in foxholes on the edge of the pad. He came down, almost in a hover, while the radio operator identified the commander of the troops and told him to land. Still not sure, Baker touched down but held some collective and 2500 RPM. Firing
immediately broke out, and the radio operator was shot in
the stomach. Baker pushed the nose over and flew off the
pad and over the village. He froze the power at 2500
RPM/45" manifold pressure and headed for Luang Prabang.
When he arrived, the ground crew counted 96 holes.

M. D. Alston to WML, April 15, 1993: "I believe
DeLaurentis was the crew chief with Herb Baker when he was
shot up so badly. We had marker panels which were
alphabetically [keyed] to days of month, i.e., 1 was L, 2
was P, etc. These were changed each month and were to be
scrambled in case of attack. Herb had the new code for the
month which was past due, due to weather. At any rate, the
LZ had the correct code for the last of the month before.
When Herb got back, I said, 'Weren't you scared?' His reply
was, 'NO.' I said he must have nerves of steel. Herb said,
'Red, I was too busy looking at some little guy with a 3.5
rocket launcher trying to aim with the rotor blast. Too
much for him. Anyway, I got out.' The Lao pilot was
killed and DeLaurentis was hit in the (elbo?). He was then
sent to the Philippines in maintenance."

March 31, 1962
Michael LaDue hired (remained until 15 September 1964).

LaDue enlisted in the Army in the late 1950s.
Volunteered for Special Forces and served in Europe.
Discharged; went to University of Maryland, jumping on
weekends. He was running out of money just about the time
he heard about the job in Southeast Asia. He was one of
five kickers hired to replace the original group (mainly
smoke jumpers) who left following a contract dispute. Earl
Young was in charge of the new group, which included Hugh
Olsen, Bob Herald, Bill Sherman, and Russ Green. Young flew
one hairy covert mission and never flew any more. He left
several months later, after security had found that he had
been opening gun containers to take out weapons for his own
collection.

Janke: Joined army after high school and volunteered
for Special Forces. Trained with Mike LaDue. Served with
small detachment in Berlin and became familiar with covert
operations. He ran into LaDue in Washington in early 1960s.
It was LaDue who got him interested in going out to
Southeast Asia.

He arrived shortly after LaDue (remained until 1965).
Young was in charge of AFS program was dismissed shortly
after Janke go there. He recalls the primitive conditions
at VTE. There was a PSP runway; operations was a small two-
room shack adjacent to the runway; the Grey House for crew
quarters was bare bones housing, with everyone sleeping in a
large room on something a little more than a cot. It was a
grim period in many way, with a bad political situation and high casualties. However, esprit d’corps remained high. There were massive changes over the three years. Most of the missions were for refugees, involving food and clothing. AAM also flew medical evacuations for the refugees (mainly Hmong). There was little enroute care provided, so he and LaDue (who had medical cross-training in the Special Forces) extracted the Filipino doctors at the volunteer hospital at VTE and arranged for refresher training and medical supplies.

Fred Walker was chief pilot: "an outstanding administrator and chief pilot." He was a real professional. Janke often flew on check rides, and always came away impressed. Walker was tough and demanding. He established a detailed program for C-123 checkout for AFSs (hydraulic system). George Peske was chief pilot/C-46, and Don Campbell chief pilot/C-123. Station Manager Roy Stitt was not liked by the pilots. "He was very abrasive, and very quick, and very positive." He took an aggressive approach to problems. However, Janke believed that the gruff exterior masked a soft-hearted interior. He really cared. Also, he was a knowledgeable operations manager.

During the early period, it was realized that Air America needed an SAR capability, with a medical team at the point of rescue. After discussing the situation with Stitt and Walker, Janke and LaDue formed the team, supported by the Filipino hospital. The program began late in 1962. They undertook numerous missions over the next three years. Other later were trained for the program, including traffic manager Lynn Goodman (ex-Special Forces).

By 1965, the AFS program had grown to over 200 personnel, US and foreign. There was a system of pallatizing cargo and a parachute loft. Janke got involved in traffic.

April 6, 1962:
William H. Beale, Jr., and George R. Varney killed in L-20 (Beaver) at Xiang Dat while trying to take off in overloaded aircraft on hot day.

Telephone interview with Paul M. Severson, April 9, 1991:
Severson was still getting checked out and was standing by at Vientiane to fly with Beale. Beale decided to take Varney, an ex-World Airways pilot who was slated to take over as chief pilot for the Beaver program. Beale took little interest in the Beavers and paid scant attention to the manual, preferring a "seat-of-the-pants" approach to the airplane. He seemed to think that his assignment was a form of punishment. He had a heavy load of fuel, two Army passengers (a major and a sergeant - contracting personnel), and a 55-gallon drum of motor fuel that had been put onboard
at Xieng Dat. His wheels caught tree stumps at the end of the runway, the aircraft flipped over and exploded. Fred Walker went through the wreckage and came up with a theory about flap malfunction; everyone else blamed the accident on Beale's attempt to take off with an overloaded aircraft on a hot afternoon.


Telephone interview with Fred Walker, April 10, 1991:

Walker investigated the accident the next day. The strip was 900 feet long (elevation 2,500 feet). The aircraft used 1,500 feet. Beale pulled the airplane off the ground; a stump hit the right elevator, the prop hit a stump, the airplane stalled, rolled right, hit a stump, ran into a log, flipped over on its back and exploded. Walker believes the valve flap had leaked from the take off position. Beale did not have sufficient lift. As far as Walker could determine, the aircraft was not overweight.

April 10, 1962

Walker memo to all Helio and L-20 pilots: aircraft will arrive at termination points by sunset - Walker notes weather changes in April - after rains have cleared up present smoke conditions later this month, generally excellent flying weather can be expected until October.

"The arguments against flying a single engine aircraft at night in possible severe weather with inadequate to perhaps no radio aids are too numerous to detail here but would probably start with the judgment of the pilot involved being seriously questioned and end by stating that everyone on the company's and customers staff are subjected to a great amount of concern because of the late arrival of one of our single engine aircraft. A case in point occurred yesterday evening."

April 15, 1962

Art Wilson to Stretch Lewis: Wilson flew 140 hours in March and already has 76 for April. "We've got more gonney bird pilots now that we've got good sense."

May 6, 1962

Pathet Lao force 5,000 of Phoumi's best troops across the Mekong and into Thailand from the northwestern Lao town of Nam Tha. Twelve White Star advisers flown out by helicopter on May 6. On May 15 Kennedy announces movement of 3,000 U.S. military personnel to Thailand. On May 25, Khruschev announces that Moscow continues to support the establishment of a neutral Laos. [Sam Jordan: Even
Phoumi's best troops didn't amount to much; all the enemy had to do was to walk into Nam Tha."

CIA Special National Intelligence Estimate 58-3-62, "Implications of the Fall of Nam Tha," 9 May 1962 [DDRS 1981/414A]:

On May 6, Communist forces attacked and quickly seized the provincial capital of Nam Tha in northern Laos. The garrison of 4,500 Laotian troops retreated. The attacking forces consisted solely of Pathet Lao/NVA troops. There has been no evidence of Chinese troops participating in the attack, although the Chinese likely permitted transit for attack on Muong Sing on May 3 prior to attack on Nam Tha. Also, there has been logistical support by Soviet/NVA airlift.

The withdrawal of RLG forces eliminates RLG authority in all northern Laos and opens western Luang Prabang province and all of Nam Tha province to Communist domination. The Communists are likely to continue their advance toward Ban Houei Sai.

General Phoumi reinforced the garrison several times despite Embassy and MAAG advice to the contrary. He added a parachute battalion a week before the attack.

The attack represents a flagrant violation of the cease fire, although it is believed that the Soviet Union continues to favor a political settlement for Laos.

Dick Elder to WML, 15 Aug 91: "I worked the Nam Tha area for several weeks prior to the fall on 6 May. The 5th of May was the day Hitchman and I (Russell was my co-pilot) took a group of Lao Generals to Nam Tha. It was the afternoon of the 5th Muong Sing fell. We spent the night moving from rice paddy to rice paddy not knowing who was who. The white star team was looking after us. Tom Dooley's hospital was burned down the afternoon of the 5th and everying going to pot. We took off at daylight the morning of the 6th with the Generals. Charlie and Dan were on the way up to get the White Star team. The support for Nam Tha was flown out of L.P. and Charlie Weitz was the lead pilot there during the time. I think Charlie knows more about the overall helicopter support program."

May 9, 1962

Jim MacFarlane hired as Beaver pilot. After three weeks of ground school (Ralph Adams was instructor) in Taipei, he was assigned to Udorn. Conditions were primitive and flying was hazardous. He remembers muddy, short strips during the rainy season, bad weather, and mountainous terrain. Keeping water out of the gas tank was a constant problem, and aircraft had to refueled through a chamois. The Beavers were ex-Army aircraft, stripped of all non-essential equipment, and usually flown fully loaded. The
main mission was to support Special Forces White Star teams, commanded by Co. Earl Merideth, that were located along the Mekong River and inland, training local forces. There were eight Beavers at Udorn, Bob Ferguson was the chief pilot. MacFarlane kept busy, flying 185 hours in one month. He would haul supplies to the White Star camps, then airdrop to forces in the field. He dropped a lot of rice and occasionally took small arms fire.

Jack Leister, 25 May 1990: The Beavers were used in support of Special Forces. Bob Ferguson was chief pilot. He had a house in VTE that was filled with electronic gear and was suspected on selling it on the side. He also was involved in padding log books, along with some other pilots in the program. He left under a cloud. His replacement, John Simon, was a nice guy but he was not a manager.]}

May 12, 1962
Fred Walker in Caribou lands at Long Tieng for first time. [JHH]

May 14-September 15, 1962
Six Special Forces teams trained eight 100-man Meo ADCs (Auto-Defense de Choc) at Site 20, located at the foot of Phu Bia, sharing responsibility with CIA. With collapse of FAR defenses in MR II, Meo only force left to resist PL. Decision was made to equip and train Meo to conducted raids in enemy's rear. Also civil action program for Meo. [Tim Castle: two new bases established in mid-1962: Sam Thong and Long Tieng, one for refugees and one for military operations. 750 Hmong flow to Thailand for intensive training course at Hua Hin. These men are then used for training at Long Tieng. Hmong begin sending 10-12 man teams into northeastern Laos to gather intelligence and harass enemy.] [WML note: Long Tieng was established later.]

[Edgar "Pop" Buell, an Indiana farmer, joined the pacifist International Volunteer Service (IVS) in 1960 and was assigned to an experimental farm in Xiang Khouang province, helping Hmong to improve their farming techniques. He quickly wins their confidence. With outbreak of fighting, he becomes the key to assisting Hmong refugees.]

May 16, 1962
Severson to his mother: "I think I made over $2000 last month but not so much this month because we haven't been flying... All the airplanes are down due to lack of parts." [Severson flew 123:33 in April and 75:01 in May, mainly to Pakse, Saravane, Savannakhet, and Thakhek.]

May 17, 1962

20
3000 Marines begin landing in Bangkok in response to troop movements near Lao border by PL. Marines flown to Udorn. [Marines leave in August.]

May 26, 1962
Memo from Ben Moore: "Effective immediately, the possession and carrying of firearms of any type on the ground or in flight by Company flight personnel and ground personnel in Southeast Asia is strictly forbidden." No later that June 1, "all personnel will sign a statement to the effect that he has turned in to the Security Supervisor all his firearms . . ." [Wayne Knight to WML, 25 Sept 91: "Lots of unhappiness among crew members about this edict - not totally adhered to."]

M. D. Alston to WML, 15 April 93: "This was agreement by U.S. and Thailand because of the King and Queen picture shooting. Almost kicked out of Thailand all U.S."

June 1962
Aderholt Helio accident at Sam Thong.

June 11, 1962
Agreement on coalition government for Laos.

June 19, 1962
Kennedy approves NSAM 162, calling for increased assignment of Special Forces personnel to support CIA - also, emphasis on Thai and Filipino personnel in anticipation of withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Laos.

June 27, 1962

June 30, 1962
Severson flew 126:54 in L-20 during June.

July 3, 1962
Leonard Unger replaces Horace Smith as ambassador. He will remain until November 1964.

July-August 1962
Donald Bues, hired July 7, recalls landing at Long Tieng was his was in training on the Helio in July and August. He landed in knee-high grass, indicating little traffic (and all light plane). Huts were oriented alongside the strip, with one long hut on the south side. The later buildup was to the northwest. Vang Pao was at Long Tieng at this point in time.
Interview with Charles S. Whitehurst, September 30, 1993, Bethesda, MD

Whitehurst was born in 1923 at Dothan, AL. His parents were living in Blountstown, between Dothan and Panama City, and Dothan was the nearest hospital. He moved to Panama City when he was 10 or 11. After graduating from Bay County High School, he got a job with the Southern Craft Paper Company. Drafted into the Army in 1942, he went with the Corps of Engineers, where he had demolitions training. He volunteered for OSS and was sent to China where he took jump training under Lou Bucker at Kunming. He was supposed to jump into North Vietnam and destroy a railroad bridge, with the assistance of Ho Chi Minh’s guerrillas. The mission was cancelled after the atomic bomb was dropped.

Whitehurst remained in China after the war, serving with OSS, CIG, and CIA. He served on Taiwan in the early 1950s. Later in the decade, he had the Indochina desk at headquarters. He recalls the battle over policy in Laos with Ambassador Smith. Phoumi and Phoumi were ineffective; Souvanna was indecisive. Campbell James, a case officer, was an early advocate of Souvanna. A friendship developed between the two. James, who spoke fluent French, loved parties. (Souvanna, following the signing of the Geneva Accords, never blamed the CIA for his problems.)

Whitehurst was COS in Singapore when sent to Laos in July 1962. He had a good relationship with Ambassador Unger. Whitehurst pledged to do all possible to adhere to the Geneva Accords. He supervised the Meo program (the Meo wanted arms to protect themselves against PL and NVA attacks; they were fighting for themselves and should not be viewed as a U.S.-supported mercenary force). Lair was in tactical control of the Meo program. Jansen, COS in Bangkok, had not liked the fact that Vientiane was in control, and he rarely had spoken to Jorgenson, Whitehurst’s predecessor. Whitehurst was not permitted to visit Long Tieng for the first nine months that he was in Laos. Vint Lawrence was nominally under Tony Po, but Whitehurst made it clear to Vint that he reported to him. Whitehurst feared being accused of undermining the Geneva Accords and avoided contact with Phoumi. Unger found the military difficult to control and favored CIA control of the Meo program. Souvanna permitted Air America to supply Meo refugees although he had no love for the Meo; if he hadn’t, Laos would have fallen. Souvanna constantly complained to Unger about Air America, as the Communists were always raising the issue. If Air America had been forced out, only the name would have changed.
Des FitzGerald had been an aide to Stilwell in Burma. Jorgensen had a paramilitary background and had been an aide to Lansdale in Vietnam.

When Kong Le was driven off the PDJ, he left without any supplies. Whitehurst asked Unger for funds to be given to Kong Le in the name of Souvanna. Souvanna agreed. Brongersma flew Whitehurst to Kong Le, where he delivered the funds.

Brongersma "lived high" but the flexible and "thoroughly dependable." Doole opposed Bird & Son. Whitehurst threw business to Brongersma to keep him going because Air America had become too bureaucratic for a rapid response. There would have been no alternative if Brongersma had been forced out. Bill Bird bought a half interest in Dutch's operation. Dutch later sold his half to CASI at a good profit and went into partnership with a fraudulent businessman in Hong Kong. Whitehurst, who was COS in Hong Kong in 1968, warned Dutch. Dutch loved to play high stakes poker games with Air America pilots and would win and lose thousands of dollars in an evening.

In 1964, Whitehurst returned to headquarters and took over the China desk. He was COS in Hong Kong in 1968. In 1972, he was deputy chief of the Far East Division. He retired in 1975.
July 7, 1962

Ed Eckholdt flew in Caribou B-853 at Downsview, Ontario. He had been sent to Canada to ferry one of the first Chinese-registered DHC-4As to Taiwan. B-851, flown by Don Schanabel, followed. Eckholdt and copilot Leroy Letendre departed on July 10, following a one-day checkout, and flew to Tainan via Edmonton, Anchorage, Shemya, Tokyo, and Taipei. The aircraft was converted for airdrops at Tainan. Eckholdt then flew it to VTE on July 22.

Eckholdt found the Caribou "an excellent little airplane." Later in July, he and Fred Walker made sixteen landing on a 1200-foot strip. During a two-day period, they made more than twenty landings a day on the 1400-foot strip at Ban Na, ferrying troops from Vang Vieng. The Caribous were sometimes used for airdrops, but mainly for STOD, operating on runways of 1000 to 1500 feet in all weather conditions. "They performed extremely well." Performance got even better when a reverse system was added.

Hazen: The first two Caribous were silver with only the Chinese registration (B-851 and B-853) on the tail. In August 1963, Dave Fairbanks, the instructor pilot from DeHavilland, trained Hazen on the aircraft. The Caribou was a good airplane with reliable engines - "a very comfortable airplane."

July 14, 1962

Rousselot orders "B" nationality indicator removed from exterior of all company-operated aircraft assigned to SE Asia.

July 21, 1962

1,000-1,500 PL troops begin mop up operation against central Lao counterguerrilla force. Friendly casualties are three killed, six injured, and two missing. Enemy lost an estimated 40-50 KIA/WIA. "In order to prevent support to the Meo program being considered violation of the Geneva Accords, [ ] has ceased all ammunition drops to the Meos with the signature of the Geneva agreements. Weapons drops were discontinued on 27 June. Rice and other non-military supply drops will continue." "Status Report of the Task Force on Southeast Asia," n.d. DDRS 1978/337C

July 22, 1962:

Charles T. Deiffenbach killed in Helio B-837 at Pha Kao (LS-14) when aircraft hit by gunfire.

Dearborn: "Tom" Deiffenbach got nailed by a .50 caliber. He crashlanded. Three Meo passengers were burned to death when the aircraft caught fire. When Deiffenbach jumped out, a tree branch went through his chest. He died a few days later.
Hazen: Dearborn and Vint Lawrence walked up the mountain to the wreckage and brought out the body. Deiffenbach was a fairly new pilot.

[Jim Glerum has photo of Deiffenbach]

July 23, 1962
Geneva Agreements signed ("Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos"): U.S. pledges to support tripartite government headed by Souvanna as prime minister - all foreign military personnel (except for small French training mission) to leave Laos. U.S. withdraws 666 military personnel and 403 Filipino technicians before deadline of October 7 [high level recon missions continue].

[Navy history: The situation in Lao was relatively static from July 1962 to April 1964. The neutralists, rightists and Pathet Lao provided representatives to the coalition formed at Geneva but retained their power bases and geographical strongholds. North Vietnam continued to support Pathet Lao with arms and material. They made increasing use of southern Laos to infiltrate men and supplies into South Vietnam. CIA trained and armed Meo under Vang Pao. US maintained ties with rightists. Neutralists begin to lean toward US.]

[Dommen: "In the de facto partition, General Phoumi’s trump card was the continued legality of Air America, whose airlift permitted thousands of Meo tribesmen to remain outside the clutches of the Pathet Lao. . . . Air America’s contract was with the American economic-aid mission in Vientiane. The mission, in turn, operated under an agreement with the Royal Government."

[Stevenson: With the signing of the Geneva Agreement, Laos passed into the background and Washington’s attention focused on Vietnam. Although the technical provisions of the agreement would be violated, there was no major international crisis. It was tacitly accepted that the Pathet Lao would not seek a major increase in territory and especially avoid moving into the Mekong Valley; the U.S. would refrain from threatening Pathet Lao control of its own zone. "Although the agreements never got full compliance, the settlement was not seriously challenged until 1969."

July 31, 1962
Severson flew 95:10 in July in L-20; 76-50 in August; and 117:98 in September.

August 14, 1962
Able Mable RF-101 hit near Phong Savan; landed wheels up at Don Muang.

23
September 9, 1962

Art Wilson to R. W. Lewis: "Flying has slowed down a little bit. We keep getting new ones. Same old story. The turnover is terrific. Some helio pilots showed up the other day & discovering that we don’t have OMNI, turned around & went home. Prolly the smartest move they ever made." Wilson says that he started flying C-123s in August.

"MAAG is going to desert us the first week of next month; I don’t know how they’re going to get the OTHER alien troops out of this country. That leaves Air America, USOM, Pathet Lao & a few other in the Kingdom. Nobody here but us Poor Terrified Civilians & Terrified Soldiers." Rousselot has required "Class B Type Southeast Asian Uniforms. We all look like the chain gang at Leavenworth."

September 13, 1962

Harry R. Casterlin hired.

[See interview for background]

When Casterlin arrived, helicopters were still doing a good deal of flying in Laos, pulling out White Star personnel. However, in November this stopped and there was little flying in Laos until mid-1963. This was a time of low morale and flying hours decreased. The company decided not to check out copilots as captain, placing Casterlin and Estes in an unpleasant situation. They had a base pay of only $650 a month, with little project pay and no overtime. AAM was a quasi-military organization. Abadie was chief pilot at first; he was "firm but fair." It was said that he couldn’t drink as he got sick, and he did not hang around with the pilots. Earl Black [V.A. Black] was chief pilot after Abadie [terminated 1 March 1964], then J. L. Coble [terminated 1 September 1964]. Wayne Knight then took over. He was "one of the boys." On Abadie’s advice, he began to distance himself from the pilots. Although he slowly changed, he remained "a great guy."

[Knight to WML, 25 Sep 91: "To my recollection, Virl Black was never chief pilot. Coble relieved Abadie who transferred to Taipei. Black was Coble’s assistant & Jerry McEntee was check & training. McEntee and Elmer Munsell went to Nepal with Air Ventures & I became pilot in charge of check & training. Black resigned. Coble was fired for fighting with F/M Joe Marlin & I suddenly became chief pilot. Don’t recall any advice from Abadie; he was in Taipei.”]

As flying diminished, the company used the opportunity to get rid of several pilots. Several others quit. In early January 1963, Casterlin went to BKK to fly for JUSMAG. There was one helicopter stationed there permanently for this operation. Casterlin and Estes rotated as copilot, while a number of captains rotated through. They used to
visit remote villages in Thailand in an attempt to improve ties to the central government.

Some pilots were rather casual about flying. Eaton and Marshall, for example, used to read paperbacks in the cockpit.

September 22, 1962
Ed Dearborn assigned as acting chief pilot, Helio/Dornier operation.
Abadie and Jack Leister will jointly assume duties and responsibilities of chief pilot, Beaver program.
Captain John Simons relieved as chief pilot, Beaver program. [Sam Jordan: The rumor at the time was that Simons was flying illegal drugs.]

October 13, 1962
Casterlin to his parents: No new pilots since he arrived. Air America has about 40 UH-34 pilots. He flew about 46 hours during the first week of October, but have not flown since then. "It is beginning to look as though I will never make captain." While flying with Tom Moher, he was hit the left fuselage by .30 caliber, picking up 9 holes in the ship. "My first experience under fire."

October 1962
Last of Special Forces personnel withdrawn from Laos. MAAG leaves VTE and relocates in the Capitol Hotel, Bangkok. CIA (Lair and Landry) relocate to Nongkhai.

[Jim MacFarlane flew a Beaver out of Pakse, pulling out teams from the Bolovens Plateau. He was asked to take pictures, in case the military returned. With the Beaver program winding down, he left AAM and returned to the US.]

[Colby:] Harriman made it "forcefully clear" to Colby, who became of the Far East Division following the Bay of Pigs, that the CIA and military were to comply fully with the General Agreement. The Special Forces teams were to be pulled out, and Air America was to end its airdrops to the tribal armies in the north. "Somewhat grudgingly," he agreed to leave two CIA officers [Po and Vint Lawrence] in the mountains to monitor the situation and report. Their weekly intelligence reports soon grew more ominous. The 7,000 NVA troops not only remained in place but also were soon expanding their area of control, attacking neutralist forces and pushing the Meos from their settlements. Meo resistance weakened as their ammunition stocks became depleted. "My arguments become more forceful, reflecting the intense cables I was receiving from the two CIA officers who were still up in the hills observing and reporting on what was happening." It was plain to them that the NVA/PL were out to crush the Meo. The Meo had accepted the truce
at the urging of the US; now they were unable to defend themselves. Harriman finally approved the secret dispatch of a minimum quantity of ammunition "with strict instructions that our officer make it clear that it was only to be used for defensive fighting." Harriman insisted that he personally approve each and every clandestine supply flight, and its cargo, that lifted off from a friendly Thai air base with a load of weapons and ammunitions, and crossed the border to dodge among the jungle-covered mountains of northern Laos to find the secret drop zones our officer had chosen.

At the NVA forces grew to 70,000 in 1962, the CIA was authorized [in spring 1963] to increase the number of tribal unit and to send harassing parties into areas controlled by the NVA to locate their supply depots, ambush trucks, mine roads, and mortar outposts. Tribal patrols were airlifted into battle in Air America helicopters.

Vinton Lawrence: Lawrence was born in NYC on 25 June 1939. His father was a investment counsellor. He attended Phillips Exeter Academy, then went to Princeton, where he majored in art history. He graduated in June 1959 with an ROTC commitment. He was recruited for the CIA by Lippincott. This was still an old boy network as Lawrence's father had served with OSS during World War II. He began training in the fall of 1960 as a military detailer. At the time, all incoming officers were given paramilitary training. He was briefed for the Tibetan project, but instead sent to SE Asia. He arrived VTE in February 1962 and would remain in the area until February 1966.

At first, Lawrence roomed with Adresevic in the Helio House. In September 1962 he visited Long Tieng with Pop Buell. The valley had "20 water buffalo and five people." He spent a week working on plans for a new base at Long Tieng. In October, the movement from Pha Kho began. Lawrence returned to the US for 48 hours to be formally discharged from the Army and join the CIA. When he returned, he was assigned to Long Tieng with Tony Po. The site remained primitive for the next 18 months.

There was a program to organize the Hmongs in a civic action program. PARU trained Hmongs as counterparts for Special Operations teams, as stay-behind units. Also, there was some guerrilla action. The major purpose for the next 18 months was to gather intelligence on the NVA. Lawrence had 35 teams with radios making daily reports. In the evening, he would draw up a SITREP, which would be sent to Lair by a Thai radio operator (CW). (Later, the report would be punched.) It was clear from the reports that the NVA had not left.

Lawrence enjoyed these quiet months at Long Tieng. He learned to speak Lao (he already spoke French), and he would talk to the people, learning their history and their
customs. He ate three meals a day with Vang Pao, communicating in a mixture of army French and Lao. He often lectured VP to prepare for the day when the US would leave. Tony was in charge of "the airport, morale, and drinking." Inactivity was bad for him, and many nights Vint had to carry him back to their small hut after drinking with VP. Tony came to resent Vint (jealous?). He left Long Tieng early in 1965 to take over the Yao program after Ojibway's death. He was replaced by Mike Lynch. Vint remained chief of unit until February/March 1966, when he was replaced by John Randall. The Hmong program, which had grown "by inches" from 1962 to 1964 (to approx. 10,000-12,000), doubled during the last two years (to 24,000).

Colby was sensitive to the US treatment of tribal minorities. Bill Lair shared this sensitivity. Lair tried to run the program so the the US advisers could work their way out of a job. Lawrence opposed the Hmong T-28 program, but Lair supported it. The Hmong later became pawns in a larger game under Shackley and Devlin.

Lawrence had spent two tours in Laos. Colby refused to send him back for a third lest he never return (either go native or be killed in an airplane crash - Lawrence already had been in five airplane accidents). He was assistant to Colby for a year, then went to the Woodrow Wilson School in 1967. He served a special assistant to Paul Nietze for one year on leave from the CIA, then left the Agency.

Lair was smart, sensitive, and clever. He preached the idea that every situation was different; forget the training manual. Lair made VP think about the time when the US would leave. A "taciturn Texan," he had been brought up by a strong willed mother. He could be dogged and determined when he had an idea. He remained in Thailand during the 1950s at the price of a career [Lerum disagrees; this was not uncommon at the time.] He had an arranged marriage while there. He had a good relationship with VP.

VP was "an excellent military leader." He "liked to think big." He never dealt in opium but he kept a supply under his house which he intended to sell when the US left so that he could pay his immediate entourage. [Lerum says that VP during 1950s did receive some money from opium grown nearby. This was low grade opium, used for smoking and not good for refining.] Air America did not have any involvement in drugs. There was no opium factory at Long Tieng.


Quoting Lawrence on VP: "He was shrewd, bright, and had an extraordinary touch with people. He was terribly brave and his exploits had been clearly documented. He could be ruthless when he needed to be, but he was politically very savvy. He did not come from a particularly
powerful family, but through a series of good marriages to politically important families he had developed a sort of base."

Grant notes that "most Americans assigned to the north Laos tended to view opium from the perspective of the Meo. The Meo did not use it except to treat sickness. They considered opium the same way an American farmer might look at corn or soybeans. It was their cash crop and one whose prices underwent fluctuations in the marketplace. They had nothing to do with refining it into heroin or morphine." Hmong produced about 100 tons of opium at year. Methven estimated that it could be purchase for less than a million dollars, and he twice recommended that it be done (planning to dump it on China). Quoting Lawrence: "I'd get a message every month asking about Vang Pao and the opium. And it became a bit of a joke, because I would go down to Vang Pao and say, 'It's that time of month again and I need to fill out the form sent from the agency.' I knew where the opium was stored. It was under his house. He kept one ton there so that when the Americans left he would have some money. It was always the same bales, the same stuff - his insurance. His basic trade-off with Touby Ly Fong was that he did not put pressure on Touby, and Touby was running the opium. Vang Pao needed Touby, because Touby could make a lot of trouble for him in Vientiane. Vang Pao hated Vientiane and didn't like the Lao leadership, which he considered corrupt. So he left Touby alone and the quid pro quo was that Touby left him alone. It was very clear to Vang Pao that we didn't want him to be mixed up with the opium. And he said he understood that." US pilots carried opium, Lawrence noted, but only in the sense that it was impossible to check everyone getting on an airplane; but you are talking only about small amounts.

Grant (and Lawrence) believe that the guerrilla action undertaken by the Hmong from 1962 to 1965 "stood as the CIA's most successful undertaking in Southeast Asia."

Air war began in March 1965. An air officer was assigned to work with VP. "But giving guerrilla fighters air support was the first step in turning them into conventional forces. Quoting Lawrence: "Vang Pao started to go down a slippery slope. We pushed him more and more into a conventional military mode, which I felt was death to his people. The pressure to do this came from various directions. The agency and the State Department didn't want the U.S. military back in Laos, and I think that were right. Sullivan was there and very effective at brokering, moving back and forth. But this put pressure on Vang Pao to do more - to go in and hold the Plaine des Jarres, for example. And some of it came from Vang Pao. He'd had three years of pretty good success, and he saw this as an opportunity for himself. So he stubbed the toe of the North Vietnamese, and they started wheeling in the big boys." Lawrence left
before the destruction of the Hmong began. The process began under Shackley, who took over as station chief in 1966. Hmong operation was run from Thailand, but responsibility belonged to Laos station chief [actually, the ambassador]. Under Shackley’s direction, Hmong became a conventional army.

Rhyne: Rhyne had arrived in SE Asia in July 1962. He spent two months working for Al Blizzard [Alpheus W. Blizzard, Jr.] on a program that involved building airstrips all around the border of Thailand. When he returned to Vietiane in October, he was sent to Nong Khai to work for Bill Lair, who had moved his operations across the river from Vietiane. Bob Hamblin of Bird & Son, who had a Baron, also was there. Lair, Landry, Rhyne, and Hamblin became close in the months ahead. They had dinner together almost every evening. Rhyne often would be present when Lair would discuss problems with his case officers. Rhyne and Hamblin became unofficial air officers, suggesting ways to make the best use of air assets. Rhyne was accepted as one of Lair’s group, and this relationship continued when Lair moved to Udorn. He recalls Lair, often smoking a cigar, usually pausing before giving thoughtful answers to questions. In 1963, Lair moved from Nong Khai to Udorn. He initially was located in a shack on stilts next to the Air America office (also on stilts). The Air America office as Administration Building #2; Lair was in Administration Building #1. Within a year, Lair moved into more spacious quarters across the ramp which continued to bear the designation AB-1 (although the origins of the designation was forgotten). Rhyne and Hamblin (who lived together) remained unofficial air officers. The first real officer (Jack Deacon, an ex-USAF captain) did not show up until 1965.

Blaufarb: "By October 1962 a lull had fallen over the battlefield in the tribal areas, and the decision was made to leave the tribesmen with a capability to conduct short-term defensive operations only. At the same time, certain standby arrangements were made to facilitate a revival of support activity to tribal groups should they come under Communist attack. Souvanna Phouma was discreetly advised of this decision. He did not demur, although at the time he had no sympathy with the Meo and the other guerrillas, whom he viewed with traditional Lao suspicion aggravated by the fact that the program had been sponsored by his political opponents, the rightists under General Phoumi Nosavan."

"At this point, the various programs identified with tribal irregulars were little more than relics inherited from an earlier set of objectives and related policies. Indeed, they were something of an embarrassment since they ran counter to the objectives of current policies. The hope was that they could be wound down and terminated as the RLG
developed its capability to defend its territory, including the tribal areas."

Stevenson: An agreement signed on October 7 provided for increased assistance to refugees despite objections from Pathet Lao who did not want Air America delivering supplies to opposition villages within their zone of control. "The relief and resupply missions were the key American contributions to the breakdown of the Geneva agreements." However, both sides were guilty of violations.

"Aid to the Meo tribes was a major and growing program for the Americans" after the Geneva agreements. White Star teams made a major effort to organize the Meo in 1961-62. By 1962, Special Forces had built up Meo strength to 15,000. US withdrew military advisers in October; however, Vang Pao had stockpiled supplies at the CIA-built airstrip in Long Tieng. US civilians remained with the Meo to coordinate relief supplies. People like Pop Buell soon slid from relief into military operations. The AID program became the cover for CIA activities when the Requirements Office was established in October 1962. The RO was staffed by military officers. The only difference between the RO and MAAG was that personnel were technically civilians, were not involved in field operations, and did not conduct end-use checks of equipment.

Leftist opposition to supply ops to Meo and neutralists led to shooting down of US planes in November 1962 [Riley] and January 1963 [Fore]. US defended effort as legal under Geneva agreements. The US also conducted covert operations by intelligence teams along the Ho Chi Minh Trail under the code name Operation Hardnoise.

Castle, citing interviews with Shirley/Lair/Landry, notes that in late 1962 the CIA established the 4802d Joint Liaison Detachment (JLD) at Udorn under Lair. It began a close working relationship with a Thai military organization known as "Headquarters 333." "The two organizations, manned with about 35-40 Americans and a slightly higher number of Thais, acted as a joint U.S.-Thai command center for covert military and intelligence collections activities in Laos."

October 25, 1962
M.L. Stitt memo: Effective immediately, Air America aircraft in support of USAID shall not carry troops or ammo of any kind.

October 26, 1962 {m}
John Wiren in Hello B-849 from Long Tieng to Phu Cum. Wiren ran into severe downdraft on final approach to Phu Cum and landed short of the runway. The aircraft suffered extensive damage; Wiren was OK.
October 31, 1962

Ed Eckholdt (who was somewhat fluent in French) took Ambassador Sullivan and his car from VTE to Xieng Khouang on the PDJ for a meeting with Kong Le [logbook shows Sandaval and Herald as crew]. The ambassador was attempting to persuade Kong Le to come over to the Royal Lao Army side. Eckholdt waited with the Caribou at the airstrip, which was ringed by gun positions, as the ambassador drove off for his discussions with Kong Le. One result of these talks was the decision to bring supplies into Xieng Khouang. This ended tragically with the death of Riley and Heritage. On November 29, Eckholdt, Leterdre, and Fred Walker flew the bodies of Riley and Heritage to Bangkok on the Caribou. "It was rather a sad trip. We were all quite silent on the way down."

November 1, 1962

Pipestem and Able Mable recon missions over Laos are discontinued.

November 27, 1962:

Frederick J. Riley and Donald C. Heritage in C-123B N5005X shot down while attempting to land at Xieng Khouang. AFS Charles Swain survived crash. [Reported as wounded by hostile fire.]

On November 24, AAM had received airlift requirement for 15 tons of rice and 1 ton of salt to be flown from VTE to Xieng Khouang. 1 C-123 and 2 C-46s assigned to mission. C-123 loaded with 12,800 pounds of rice. C-46 (Coleman) and C-46 (Beatty). Aircraft departed VTE on November 27, having been assured that all proper clearances had been obtained. Xieng Khouang tower cleared the 3 aircraft to land. Riley was first. On the downwind leg at 500 feet, he was hit by 37mm and .30 caliber fire. The right engine was riddled. He crashed 3 1/2 miles southwest of the field. Swain survived. The bodies of the two pilots were brought out by Dr. Richard Shultz and Frank Janke the next day.

[Dommen: Pathet Lao attempts to subvert Kong Le's centerist troops. Souvanna Phouma appeals for help to get supplies to PDJ. Unger authorizes airlift by Air America. This upset the calculations of the Pathet Lao. They claim that the airlift is illegal and threaten to shoot down Air America aircraft. C-123 shot down by Phetsareth Artillery Group. Pathet Lao charges US of intervening in Laos in flagrant disregard of Geneva Protocol.]

[News report that PL commander had warned US about a week before Riley's flight that airdrops on the PDJ violated the Geneva agreement and that his troops would shoot down planes.]
[Stevenson: The three major Lao factions never really came together. They formed a coalition cabinet but not a coalition government. The armies never integrated. Both the US and Communists sought the allegiance of the Neutralists. The Neutralists were split: Kong Le wanted US aid while Colonel Devan Siphaseuth was strongly opposed. It was Devan's battalion that shot down Riley.

December 1962
Between October 1961 and November 1962, Air America Sikorskys flew a total of 26,766 hours with a monthly average of 18 aircraft. Air America has lost only one aircraft due to maintenance/mechanical error [Casterlin: Ed Shore in 1961], when the aircraft made a forced landing in hostile territory due to tail rotor failure (recovery was impracticable). "The above figures indicate the outstanding job Air America has done with their HUS-1s. Some of their accomplishments are, no doubt, record breaking for an operational company."