AIR AMERICA - COOPERATION WITH OTHER AIRLINES
by Dr. Joe F. Leeker

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1) Within the family: The Pacific Corporation and its parts

In a file called “Air America - cooperation with other airlines”, one might first think of Civil Air Transport Co Ltd or Air Asia Co Ltd. These were not really other airlines, however, but part of the family that had been created in 1955, when the old CAT Inc. had received a new corporate structure. On 28 February 55, CAT Inc transferred the Chinese airline services to Civil Air Transport Company Limited (CATCL), which had been formed on 20 January 55, and on 1 March 55, CAT Inc officially transferred the ownership of all but 3 of the Chinese registered aircraft to Asiatic Aeronautical Company Limited, selling them to Asiatic Aeronautical (AACl) for one US Dollar per aircraft.1 The 3 aircraft not transferred to AACl were to be owned by and registered to CATCL – one of the conditions under which the Government of the Republic of China had approved the two-company structure.2 So, from March 1955 onwards, we have 2 official owners of the fleet: Most aircraft were officially owned by Asiatic Aeronautical Co Ltd, which changed its name to Air Asia Co Ltd on 1 April 59, but three aircraft – mostly 3 C-46s – were always owned by Civil Air Transport Co Ltd. US registered aircraft of the family like C-54 N2168 were officially owned by the holding company – the Airdale Corporation, which changed its name to The Pacific Corporation on 7 October 57 – or by CAT Inc., which changed its name to Air America on 31 March 59, as the organizational chart of the Pacific Corporation given below3 shows.

Prior to March 1955, the one and only company – CAT Inc – did everything: the operation of the Taiwanese flag airline doing business as Civil Air Transport, contract and covert flying, and maintenance work. After March 1955, Civil Air Transport Co Ltd continued to be the Taiwanese flag airline, CAT Inc. (renamed Air America Inc on 31 March 59) did all contract and covert flying, and Asiatic Aeronautical Co Ltd (renamed Air Asia Co Ltd on 1 April 59) operated the big maintenance base at Tainan. Nevertheless, the management of Air America Inc, Air Asia Co Ltd, and Civil Air Transport Co Ltd was for the most part the same.

Although 3 aircraft had to be owned by CATCL, the ownership of an aircraft had little to do with its actual operator: CATCL operated aircraft owned by them and by Air Asia, and Air America operated aircraft owned by them, by Air Asia, by CATCL, by the US Government, and even by the Royal Laotian Government. But over the years, CATCL did not operate more than 3-4 aircraft at the same time, while Air America operated all the rest. For many years, only the aircraft used by CATCL wore airline titles, while Air America titles started to appear on some aircraft types only since the mid-sixties. Before, most Air America aircraft – with the exception of those in airline service in the Ryukyu Islands – were operated without any titles. To sum up: Civil Air Transport and Air Asia were not really “other airlines”, but part of the family.

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1 See the Bills of Sale photographed in: UTD/Bisson/B5 microfilm reel no.2
2 Leary, Perilous mission, p.206.
3 In: UTD/CIA/B1F10.
Organizational chart of the Pacific Corporation
(in: UTD/CIA/B1F10)

A more complex scheme, which notes all stations and also includes Thai Pacific Services and Air America Limited, is given overleaf. It apparently appeared in the late 1960ies, when Sam Thong (STG) and Savannakhet (ZVK) in Laos were small Air America Stations. For Thai Pacific Services, which had been founded in 1968, but remained dormant until 1972, see my files Company Management...II and III. Air America Limited, Hong Kong was founded in 1966 to organize the financial side (accounting, data processing, etc. of the Company) and was dissolved in 1975. The list of Air America’s northern stations given is not complete: There were not only Kimpo near Seoul (KMP), Tachikawa (TAW) and Yokota (YOK) near Tokyo, Kadena, Okinawa (KAD), and Clark near Manila (CLK), but also several other Air America destinations in Japan like Wakkanai or Itazuke and other destinations in the Pacific Ocean like Iwo Jima, Guam or Saipan that are missing here. And among the stations mentioned for Civil Air Transport, Seoul (SEL), Bangkok (BKK), Manila (MNL), Hong Kong (HKG), Taipei (TPE), Naha, Okinawa (OKA), and Tokyo (TYO) were destinations of CAT flights, but Vientiane (VTE) and Saigon (SGN) were not; Saigon only had a very important CAT ticket office. The other destinations on Taiwan, which were also small CAT Stations, are missing. So, the indications in this scheme have to be taken cum grano salis.
Air America Inc. and Civil Air Transport Company Limited: structure and relations with other companies
(UTD/Fink/B12F1)
2) Southern Air Transport

Like Air America, Southern Air Transport was controlled by the CIA, but it was not part of the Pacific Corporation. On 5 April 1960, Air America bought DC-6As N90781 and N90782 from World Airways, and both aircraft were used by Air America on the MATS Inter-Island Contract since April 60. But then, it came out that airlines that wanted to operate under the MATS contract did not only have to use DC-6A aircraft, but also had to operate under Part 42 of the CAB and had to participate in the Civil Reserve Air Fleet Program (CRAF). As Air America had no other use for the new DC-6As than the MATS Inter-Island contract and as it would require too much time to get the supplementary certificates needed, the CIA decided to acquire control of a company that already had all those qualifications and was for sale. The new company was to operate under the MATS contract, using equipment under conditional sale from Air America, Air America personnel and maintenance and ground handling services also provided by Air America under inter-company agreements. This plan was approved by the CIA, and the airline chosen was Southern Air Transport. So on 5 August 60, the CIA acquired SAT thru Roger C. Hyatt acting as cut-out. After George Doole had established the necessary contractual relationship, Southern AT really received the big MATS Inter-Island contract. Under this contract, SAT was to make 417 round-trips between Tachikawa, Kadena, Taipei, Clark, and Guam, including 365 daily trips from Tachikawa to the other bases. Operations started on 1 October 60. To bring the operation under Grundy’s control, the Pacific Division of Southern AT was created at Tachikawa, headed by David Garber, Air America’s former Chief of Flight Operations at Tachikawa. But the services and management contract between SAT’s Pacific Division and Air Asia gave Hugh Grundy executive authority. So on 30 September 60, Air America terminated its operation of the MATS contract, the Air America markings on the DC-6As were changed to SAT overnight, and Air America crews became Southern Air Transport crews – the beginning of a very successful operation that lasted until 1972.

After the MATS contract had passed to Southern Air Transport, both of Air America’s DC-6As were sold to Southern Air Transport on 30 September 60. This was not the end of the story, as now a type of cooperation began that was to last for more than a decade: Air America would buy and finance the aircraft that would be operated in the Far East by Southern Air Transport, but flown in part by Air America crews. Financial cooperation between Air America and Southern Air Transport became obvious in May 61, when Air America bought DC-6A N90784, which Southern Air Transport had leased from World Airways a couple of months before, but not for use by Air America, but by Southern Air

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5 Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee of Air America Inc of 12 April 60, in: UTD/CIA/B3F1. The first DC-6 arrived at Tainan on 30 March, the second on 12 April 60 (Leary, Manuscript, chap. V, p.319, in: UTD/Leary/B19F3).
7 Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee of Air America Inc of 12 March 63, p. 2, in: UTD/CIA/B3F4.
8 Air America bought DC-6A N90784 on 31 May 61 (List of accumulated costs as of 31 December 67, in: UTD/CIA/B40/F8).
9 Southern Air Transport-pilot Tom Jenny flew N90784 from Taipei to Clark on 21 January 61 and on test flights out of Tachikawa on 24 January 61. At least between 26 February 61 and 10 March 61, he flew N90784 on the Tachikawa-Kadena-Clark run several times, sometimes including Taipei as a stop (log book of Tom
Transport to whom it was officially leased on 28 July 61.\textsuperscript{10} On 30 April 62, Air America even bought a 4\textsuperscript{th} DC-6A, N90771,\textsuperscript{11} to be used by Southern Air Transport. Air America’s financial support to Southern Air Transport continued for the first 2 DC-6As, N90781 and N90782: Both of them had not yet been totally paid for in 1963, as they should have been. “On September 30, 1960 DC-6A/B aircraft N90781 and N90782 were sold to Southern Air Transport for $865,000 each under Conditional Sales Contracts payable in sixty monthly installments of $16,726.10 per aircraft. Effective December 31, 1962 these Conditional Sales Contracts were amended so as to provide that the unpaid balance in the amount of $507,385.21 on each aircraft be paid in three equal annual installments of $200,562 per aircraft commencing January 2, 1965.”\textsuperscript{12} This explains why, for several years until the late 60ies, all four DC-6As appeared in official Air America documents as owned by Air America but operated by Southern Air Transport.\textsuperscript{13}

![Air America DC-6A/B N90771 at Tachikawa in 1968/9](image)

\textit{(Air America Log, vol. III, no. 2, 1969, p. 1)}

At the same time, the pilots who flew these aircraft could be Air America or Civil Air Transport pilots or pilots who flew for both companies. During the second half of December

\textsuperscript{10} The Lease agreement of 28 July 61 (in: UTD/Fink/B2F15) states 1 June 61 as date of the first rental payment.

\textsuperscript{11} List of accumulated costs as of 31 December 67, in: UTD/CIA/B40F8.

\textsuperscript{12} Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee of Air America Inc of 12 March 63, p. 2, in: UTD/CIA/B3F4.

\textsuperscript{13} Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept. 1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1, Aircraft status as of 7 July 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1. They were operated out of Tachikawa by Southern Air Transport on contracts AF49(604)-699 (for MAC) and AF49(604)-4379 (for LSG) in November 65 (Aircraft status as of 1 November 65, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1) and May 66 (Aircraft status as of 5 May 66, in: UTD/Hickler/B1F2).
1960, the second half of January 61, as well as in February and March 61, SAT-pilot Tom Jenny flew N90781 on the Tachikawa-Kadena-Clark run several times, sometimes including Taipei as a stop; on 14 March 61, he flew N90781 on the Tachikawa-Saipan-Guam-Saipan-Tachikawa route. During the same period of time, Tom Jenny flew N90782 on the Tachikawa-Kadena-Clark run several times, sometimes including Taipei as a stop. Joe Hazen, a former Air America pilot who had flown Helios, Caribous and other aircraft in Laos and South Vietnam in the early sixties, flew for Southern Air Transport in the mid-sixties – for example N90784 from Kadena to Saigon to Takhli and back to Kadena on 22 November 66. He characterizes those flights as follows: “I usually carried military personnel to Saigon from Clark AFB. [...] On occasion the flights to Saigon also included MPC (military payment certificates) which I had to sign for and have an officer in Saigon sign for when I turned it over. Several million dollars were involved. [...] The flights to Takhli sometimes were ammunition and arms, other times cargo of another nature, such as air conditioners and refrigerators”. These SAT flights also included clandestine missions to “Oak Tree”, code name of the secret base of Charbatia in Eastern India used for operations against Tibet. When DC-6A N90771 returned to Air America in July 1967, Joe Hazen also returned to Air America: “On/about 1 July 1967, N90771 and N90781 came to Air America from SAT. I flew the last flight of N90771 for SAT on 30 June from Taipei to Tachikawa and then flew it for Air America on 4 July from Tachikawa to Yokota (about ten miles) to Itazuke AFB and back to Tachikawa. The last time I flew N90771 was on 17 June 1968 from Tachikawa to Misawa AFB and back to Tachikawa.”

Southern Air Transport Boeing 727 N5092 at Nha Trang in 1968 (UTD/Misc.Mat./B4F4)

There were at least 2 more links between Air America and Southern Air Transport. Air Asia, the company who owned all B-registered aircraft of Air America, had ordered 3 Boeing 727-92Cs, which eventually became N5055, N5092, and N5093. Two of them, N5055 and

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15 E-mail dated 13 August 2004 kindly sent to the author by Joe Hazen.
16 E-mail dated 5 September 2004, kindly sent to the author by Joe Hazen.
17 For details, see the file Missions to Tibet of this database.
18 E-mail dated 31 July 2004, kindly sent to the author by Joe Hazen.
N5092, were officially acquired by Air America on 31 October 66 and 5 November 66 respectively,\(^\text{19}\) but were immediately leased to Southern Air Transport and assigned to contract F11626-67-C-0022 providing flying services to MAC for use out of Yokota.\(^\text{20}\) Connie Seigrist, one of the pilots who flew the 727s, recalls: “February 1967 – I left Intermountain Aviation of Marana, Arizona to rejoin the CAT Complex of the Agency to fly B-727’s of Southern Air Transport. All of my flying was in support of the Agency’s requirements in the area. Part of the flying was for the Korean troops, transportation to and from Korea to Vietnam. The flying was routine: Military personnel and cargo transportation. Enemy ground fire was always a threat on final when landing at Saigon or take-off at night from Da Nang. 3 January 1968 – my last flight into Da Nang flying a B-727 – was slightly more than routine. I had arrived at night from Kadena. I went to Operations to file clearance and the Ops Officer said for us to move fast that the airfield would be under attack within an hour. I rushed the crew and asked the Officer to call traffic to have the aircraft off-loaded and loaded for departure immediately. We rushed to the aircraft for departure. […] As we turned for take-off, I saw the other end of the runway looking like a dozen Fourth of July celebrations in one. The tower operator called again to say they were closing down and that we were on our own. I knew we were dead ducks sitting still on the ground or in making any attempt to return to a parking area to off load our passengers. We turned off all lights entering the runway for a rolling take-off. We were light in weight. The B-727 was airborne half way down the runway. As we lifted off I made a tight left turn out practically scraping the buildings on the parking ramp with the left wing, with tracers flying all around us. Sounds impossible, but we didn’t take a single round.”\(^\text{21}\) The third 727, N5093, was immediately sold to Southern Air Transport and operated by them probably on the same type of missions, until it was bought by Air America on 16 January 68 for Civil Air Transport Co Ltd.\(^\text{22}\) The two 727s leased to Southern Air Transport returned to Air America on 30 June 72,\(^\text{23}\) and a couple of weeks later they were sold in the US and in Canada.

Although less known, the same type of story can be told about the sole Lockheed Hercules that Air America had ever owned: N7951S. Bought new on 20 November 68, this L.100-20 was leased to Southern Air Transport upon delivery from Lockheed the very same day. The original lease agreement dated 15 November 68 was to last until 31 December 70. A sale to SAT was annulled by mutual agreement of both parties, and so the lease to Southern Air Transport was extended several times, the last time to 30 June 74 until sooner terminated. But on 1 February 74, the aircraft was definitely sold to Southern Air Transport.\(^\text{24}\) So although owned by Air America all the time between November 68 and January 74, it was never flown by Air America, but only by Southern Air Transport, so that in the late 60ies and early 70ies, the Pacific Division of Southern Air Transport was really an extension of Air America.

What has been described up to now is a number of lease agreements, to which an exchange of some C-46s has to be added.\(^\text{25}\) But apparently Air America, CAT, and Air Asia

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\(^\text{19}\) List “Accumulated costs” as of 31 December 67, in: UTD/CIA/B40F8.
\(^\text{20}\) Aircraft status as of 1 May 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2.
\(^\text{22}\) Minutes of Meeting of the Board of Directors of Air America Inc of 16 January 68, in: UTD/CIA/B3F6.
\(^\text{23}\) Minutes of Meeting of the Board of Directors of Air America Inc of 17 May 72, in: UTD/CIA/B4F2.
\(^\text{24}\) Status of 5 April 74, in: UTD/CIA/B56F4.
\(^\text{25}\) In November 61, Southern bought the remains of former Air America C-46 B-850 that had been damaged in Guatemala, and in March 61, they supplied to Air America another C-46, N9894Z, which was then turned over
people had felt Southern Air Transport so close to themselves, as if SAT, too, was a member of the same family of the Pacific Corporation, although it wasn’t. Already on 28 September 71, during a meeting held at Honolulu, Paul Velte, Air America’s new CEO, had summarized developments in the Washington office, saying that “in the past SAT has been too closely related to Air America. There is now a separate SAT office.”26 On 17 March 72, Henry P. Bevans, Air America’s Vice-President Law, sent a 7-page-memorandum to the Managing Director, in which he exposed the “Relations between Southern Air Transport and Air America, Inc. and Air Asia Company Limited”.27 The reason for writing this memorandum was that “now that Southern’s Pacific Division accounting function is to be centered at the main office in Miami it is desirable to examine these relationships since SAMIA will no doubt encounter many personnel, financial and operational arrangements that are not covered by written arrangements.”28

What came out of it is really incredible. The memorandum quotes from contract no. 69-20 between Southern and Air America, which contains 2 parts: “One part provides for aircraft ground handling services at Yokota AB, Osan AB, and Clark AB. This part represents Air America’s standard ground handling contract and is essentially the same as Air America’s handling contracts with other airlines. The second main part provides for “Mutual Assistance” at Yokota AB and Tachikawa AB (but not elsewhere).”29 After quoting at length what the contract says about “Mutual Assistance”, the memo summarizes that point as follows:

“a. Each will assist the other in the ground handling of their air carrier operations and themaintenance of their aircraft.

b. The personnel of each will assist the other in maintaining operations and maintenance schedules with the supervisors of the party being assisted being in charge.

c. Tools, part, and equipment will be made available to each other on a replacement-in-kind basis.

d. Each will assist the other in their crew member training programs.

e. The agreement can be adjusted or cancelled if the assistance given becomes overly weighted in favor of one party.”30

The memo then lines out that Southern was to utilize Air Asia as primary aircraft maintenance and supply contractor and that these 2 agreements “go back in much the same form for about eleven years.”31

What this memo wants to show is that the assistance arrangement that has developed over the years “goes substantially beyond the relationship envisioned in the contract wording. [...] At times both parties have absorbed expenses that should have been charged to the other.

7. The main ‘assistance’ offered to Southern was the provisioning to Southern of both ground and flight personnel on a more or less permanent basis. Paragraph 7.2 of Contract 69-20 does contemplate that personnel of each party will assist the opposite party, but this is
apparently limited to assistance in performing a particular job or project. The personnel being ‘lent’ would be under the supervision of the other party during the duration of this project mainly because the party being assisted is by law responsible for all facets of its operations. In practice this principle has been extended so that personnel have been ‘assigned’ to work for Southern on a full time and more or less indefinite basis (some of these ‘assigned’ personnel have been on Southern’s payroll for more than ten years). In an additional deviation from the contract terms the assigned personnel, even at the lower job levels, remained largely under the control of the assigning company.

8. The assigned personnel have been retained on the personnel rosters of Air Asia and Air America and treated as being on leave without pay from these companies. Perhaps all the expenses of these personnel should have been charged to Southern during the time they were employed by Southern, but it was a deliberate decision (Home Office) that the matter be treated in this manner. Many expenses were borne by Air Asia/Air America which would appear to be inequitable. Presumably Air Asia/Air America does benefit by keeping these persons on its roster where they could be available for relatively prompt recall should their services be needed. This advantage is probably nowhere equal to costs sustained by Air Asia and Air America in carrying certain employee expenses. These expenses include the assumption of the vacation and travel expenses of U. S. citizen employees on Southern payroll up to April, 1971. During this eleven-year period these costs amounted to several hundred thousand dollars. Air America also paid the ‘company contributions’ to the Air America Retirement Plan for those participants who were assigned to Southern. These payments were made up to January, 1972, at a cost of approximately $400,000.00.”

The remaining 3 pages of the memo summarize an additional number of points that can be characterized as “expenses imbalance between the companies”, as for example the Boeing 727 lease agreement, the training program for 727 crews or assistance given to SAT outside Japan. “Southern has a representative in Taipei on the Southern payroll but his office space and secretary are provided by Air Asia. Insurance matter and aircraft scheduling are coordinated through Air Asia Taipei personnel; [...] American employees are paid through the AAL Hong Kong office; [...] Air America provides Southern with a small office and store space in Saigon (TSN) free of charge; [...] at stations where Southern is handled by Air America the local Air America manager acts as Southern’s representative, often performing services beyond those contemplated in the handling contract (such as Air America’s Kadena AB manager maintaining complete liaison with the LSG customer) and the handling charge is Air America’s standard fee; [...] certain fringe benefits for Southern’s Japan-based Chinese employees, such as retirement and annual leave costs are borne by Air America; Southern’s employees have free use of Air America’s medical facilities”, and so on. With all this in mind, it is more than understandable that to many people, Southern Air Transport’s Pacific Division seemed to be just an extension of Air America.

32 The reason why Air America’s Washington Office wanted Southern Air Transport to be treated like a member of the Pacific Corporation may have been that SAT, too, had been one of the CIA’s proprietary airlines between 1960 and 1973 (cf. Marchetti / Marks, *The CIA and the cult of intelligence*, pp.142 and 147; Robbins, *Air America*, pp.69 and 308).


3) Ground handling and sales contracts

Most contracts that Air America had with other airlines were ground handling contracts for certain airports in South East Asia: In many cases, this was Saigon’s Tan Son Nhut Airport, but in some cases like Northwest Orient Airlines it was also Hong Kong’s Kai Tak Airport, where handling was done by Air America Limited. For many airlines, handling was also done at Kadena, Okinawa or at Clark Air Base near Manila. Most if not all of the airlines served in this way made charter flights for the US Military during the war in Vietnam, transporting military personnel or their dependents or military cargo to Southeast Asia or bringing servicemen home to the United States. Contracts of this type existed between Air America/CATCL and Airlift International, Alaska Airlines, Braniff International Airways, Capitol Airlines, The Flying Tiger Line, International Airlines, Northwest Orient Airlines, Overseas National Airlines, Pan American World Airways, Saturn Airlines, Slick Airways, Southern Air Transport, Standard Airlines, Trans Caribbean Airways, Trans World Airlines, Trans International Airlines, United Air Lines, World Airways, and Universal Airlines. Similar contracts also existed with Japan Air Lines at certain airports in Japan on a call basis.35

The Air America documentary Flying Men, Flying Machines shows very well what Air America ground handling meant: As R.J. Aubry, Air America’s Station Manager at Kadena, Okinawa, points out, Air America ground handled some 225 commercial airliners per month at that time, that is in 1970/71, and these aircraft operated under contracts that airlines like The Flying Tiger Line, Seaboard World Airlines, Trans World Airlines or United Air Lines had with the Military Airlift Command.36 In the same documentary, Col. Hugh L. Baynes, Commanding Officer of the 603rd Military Support Squadron, Kadena at that time, adds that Air America ground handled the majority of commercial aircraft arriving and departing Kadena. This not only meant having all arriving passengers leave the aircraft and completely offloading all their baggage, ground handling the passengers and their baggage during the 1-2 hours ground time they had at Kadena, and helping them re-board their aircraft and loading all bags onto the aircraft. For in the meantime, Air America personnel also had to clean and straighten up the cabin, that is put new blankets in the overhead bins or prepare the seat belts.37 The same documentary also shows that Air America offered similar, if not greater services at Clark AB in the Philippines, as Bill Palmer, Air America’s Station Manager there, explains. Again, the customers were commercial airlines operating flights for the Military Airlift Command. “We act on their behalf in all areas”, Palmer explains, for at Clark AB, Air America’s services offered to various carriers not only included ground handling in the strict sense of the word, but also maintenance and managing traffic and operations on a scheduled basis – comparable to the services that a scheduled airliner would receive in the United States.38 During the second half of the sixties, Air America added to their ground handling contracts catering services offered at Kadena and Clark Air Bases, as can be seen in the letter to Capitol International Airways dated 3 August 1968, but in the fall of 1972, when the Vietnamization program made commercial flights for the Military Airlift Command no

35 All of these contracts are available at UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no.31.
38 Bill Palmer, in: Flying Men, Flying Machines, at 91/2 minutes.
longer necessary, all ground handling services at Kadena Air Base were stopped.\textsuperscript{39}

Letter of 3 Aug. 68 to Capitol Intl. Airways and Inter-Office Routing Slip of 17 Oct. 72 (both in: UTD/Bisson/B5 reel 31)

As to Traffic and Sales contracts, Air America had agreements with Air India, Air New Zealand, Air Vietnam, British Overseas Airways Corporation (contract no. 67-23), Canadian Pacific Airlines, KLM Dutch Airlines, Lao Air Lines, Lufthansa, Northwest Orient Airlines, Philippine Air Lines, SAS Scandinavian Airlines System (contract 69-21), Swissair, Thai Airways, Thai Airways International, and Trans World Airlines. In some cases, like with Air India, there were discounted fare agreements.\textsuperscript{40} But in most cases, it was just an agreement stating that Air America would handle traffic and sales affairs for that particular airline. There was still another type of contracts, and these were contracts that especially Air Asia had with some airlines for maintenance: In this way, Air Asia’s contract no. 66-05 covered “component overhaul” for the aircraft of Cathay Pacific Airways of Hong Kong, contract nos. 68-58 and 70-52 were for air frame and engine overhaul of Air Vietnam’s aircraft, contract no. 71-32 covered JT8D engine overhaul for Air Siam, and the most exotic contract of this type that Air Asia had was probably contract no. 73-20, which covered the refurbishment of 3 Boeing 727 aircraft for the Brazilian airline VARIG at $50,000 per aircraft.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{39} Letter dated 3 August 68 to Capitol Intl. Airways, and Inter-Office Routing Slip dated 17 October 72, both in: UTD/Bisson/B5 reel 31.

\textsuperscript{40} All of these contracts are available at UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no.30.

4) An unsuccessful competitor: Véha-Akat Airlines

While Air America’s close cooperation with Southern Air Transport can be explained by
the fact that both of them worked for the CIA, this type of relation did not exist between Air
America and Véha-Akat Airlines, which, with a certain reserve, was just called “a French
airline” by Air America’s Regional Security Chief SEA, D. J. Godar – maybe because
Véha-Akat’s contacts with the Agency did not last very long. During the third week of
January 1961, Véha-Akat Airlines was engaged by the CIA to fly resupply missions for
government-backed guerrillas in Laos with a C-46 (XW-PAL) and a C-47 leased from
China Airlines. Véha-Akat was a traditional charter airline with majority ownership by the
Sananikone family. In October 1955, it had acquired a Noorduyn UC-64A Norseman and
three DH.89A Dragon Rapides, to which a fourth Rapide was added in September 1956 and

Véha-Akat DH.89A Dragon Rapide F-LAAB at Vientiane on 27 April 60
(UTD/Kirkpatrick Slide Box A2, color slide no. 1KP-A2-SC5246)

two DHC-2 Beavers in June 1957. The CIA mission was initiated in January 1961, but
abruptly cancelled in February 61, after the Chinese piloted C-47 had been shot down near Pa
Doung in Laos on 19 February 61. One Lao kicker bailed out and was taken prisoner, but the
reminder of the crew all died in the crash. However, the real force standing behind Véha-

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42 In a Memorandum dated 21 October 64, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F8.
43 Conboy/Morrison, Shadow war, p. 64.
44 In his e-mail dated 14 October 2013 about Northern Star, M.S. Chen told the author: “One year later,
[“1960.12.-1961.1”], that is December 1960 to January 1961] with some of the retired pilot members from the
34th Squadron, ROCAF set up a Pei Chern Unit (北辰小組) of 23 persons, starting with one C-46 B-1509 and
one C-47 B-1505 in Laos.” Reportedly, C-46 B-1509 crashed only on 24 August 67, but the aircraft involved in
that accident (also reported for 22 and 23 August 67) seems to have been a RoCAF C-123B (see my C-123 file
within the Aircraft). So, apparently, the ill-fated Véha-Akat C-47 XW-? was ex B-1505, msn 26892.
45 Norseman F-LAAD (msn 643) was bought in October 55 and sold as N3099 in April 69; Rapides F-LAAB
(msn 6724; CoFA suspended on 27 March 61), F-LAAC (msn 6729, written off at Luang Prabang in October
58), and F-LAAE (msn 6845, written off in January 61) were bought in October 55, while Rapide F-LAAF
(msn 6935, written off on 2 May 58) was bought in September 56. DHC-2s F-LAAM (msn 989, CoFA
suspended on 12 April 61) and F-LAAN (msn 991, CoFA suspended in October 61) were bought in June 57
(Burnett/Slack/Davis, South-East Asia Civil Aircraft Registers, p.231).
46 Conboy / Andradé, Spies and commandos, pp.46 + 288, note 12; Conboy / Morrison, Shadow war, p.64.
Akat Airlines was not the CIA, but the Government of the Republic of China. Already in July 1960, three RoCAF aircraft were deployed to Wattay airport. In December 1960, the RoCAF aircraft began flying out of Vientiane to deliver supplies to YAVA (Yunnan Anticommmunist Volunteer Army) units in Burma – a continuation of what CAT had done in 1951. Participating aircraft were registered to China Airlines, [...] but controlled by I Fu-en’s 34th Special Operations Squadron. The CNAF aircraft using Wattay to deliver that support were described as ‘leased’ to Véha-Akat. On 18 January 61, US Ambassador Winthrop G. Brown told Phoumi Nosavan, head of the Lao government, that the US Government opposed any military participation by RoC regular or irregular forces in Laos, for that might give Peking a pretext for intervention. “When asked about Chinese Nationalist aircraft seen in Vientiane, Phoumi claimed China Airlines had leased them to Veha Akhat, the Lao national air carrier, to undertake onward distribution of ‘humanitarian’ aid from Taiwan. [...] The aircraft of concern to Ambassador Brown came from China Airlines’ inventory but were operated by I Fu-en’s Taiwan-based 34th Special Operations Squadron. By early February 1961, two C-46s and two C-47s from that squadron had been repainted as Veha Akhat aircraft and were flying out of Vientiane. Two had no seats and those in the others could be easily removed. Their ‘civilianized’ CNAF crews stayed at the ROC consulate and flew both scheduled passenger flights and ‘special missions’ – much like Civil Air Transport.”

Apparently a Véha-Akat C-46: XW-PAI taken by Dave Hickler at Vientiane in 1963/64 (UTD/Hickler/B54, photo no. 1-DH54-8-PB28)

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47 Gibson/Chen, The secret army, p.197. Besides C-47B B-1505 was 26892 ex 43-49631 and C-46A B-1509 msn 350 ex 43-47279 mentioned by M.S. Chen (see above), the second C-46 was apparently B-1507 msn 97. All three aircraft were the only C-46s and C-47s registered that early to China Airlines, i.e. on 6 February 60; identities from RoC CAA records, published by Martin Best in Air-Britain Archive, Sept. 2013, p.2013/118 and p.112). The two C-46s were apparently flown in Laos as XW-PAI and XW-PAL.

48 See my file Working in Remote Countries within the History of Air America.

49 Chinese Nationalist Air Force, i.e. Republic of China Air Force.

50 Gibson/Chen, The secret army, p.197.

In late January 61, most of the Taiwan-supported YAVA troops under Liu Yuan-lin were driven out of Burma into Laos: “The retreating YAVA troops were welcomed in Laos under a deal between Phoumi Nosavan and CNA Lt. General Huang Teh-mei, chief of 2nd Section (Intelligence) of Taiwan’s National Security Bureau. Their deal authorized Liu Yuan-lin to set up bases within a 50-kilometer-wide strip of Laos along the Mekong as far south as Ban Houei Sai. In return, YAVA units would help Phoumi fight his communist adversaries. With most of his troops [...], the bulk of their supplies, and their stocks of opium safely in Laos, Liu Yuan-lin set up a new headquarters at Ban Kwan.”\(^{52}\) On 8 February 61, Phoumi told American chargé J. B. Holt “that the 6,000 ROC irregulars and dependents then sheltering in Laos would be allowed to remain. Huang Teh-mei, according to Phoumi, had agreed that the ROC would support those ‘refugees’ with food and other necessities. Phoumi assured Holt that the China Airlines planes leased to Veha Akhat were being used solely for that purpose. He went on to say that YAVA’s irregulars would be resettled in Pathet Lao areas of Houa Khong province in northwestern Laos – adjacent to Burma and Yunnan – and be responsible for their own defense. [...] Phoumi’s attempt to mislead the Americans occurred even as CNAF\(^{53}\) aircraft continued to ferry cargo from Taiwan to Pakse and Savannakhet in southern and central Laos. From those towns, 34\(^{48}\) SOS crews used ROC aircraft with Veha Akhat markings for further distribution. Two C-46s were making daily flights to Luang Namtha, in Houa Khong province, to deliver weapons and supplies to the Nationalist Chinese. Holt told Phoumi that Washington wanted those troops, especially the regular CNA Special Forces, to leave Laos promptly to prevent them from being used in Laos’ civil war and possibly pushing Peking into pen intervention.”\(^{54}\) However, it was not until 12 April 61 that about 4,000 Kuomintang soldiers and their dependents had returned to Taiwan – but about the same number of Kuomintang soldiers remained in Laos.\(^{55}\) They left the country complying with the July 1962 Geneva Accords that required all foreign forces to leave Laos by 7 October 62 and departed the country for Thailand or Burma.\(^{56}\)

In spite of the crash of the C-47 in February 61 and in spite of the remaining Kuomintang soldiers being driven out of Laos in October 62, Véha-Akat Airlines survived for some years: At least two more Rapides were added in the early sixties,\(^{57}\) and some C-47s were operated in the mid-sixties.\(^{58}\) On 25 July 1967, Véha-Akat C-47 XW-PDL crashed into a mountain ridge


\(^{53}\) Chinese Nationalist Air Force.


\(^{57}\) Rapide XW-TAB (msn 6832) was bought in September 1960 and nosed over upon landing at Vang Vieng probably the same month (a photo can be seen in Love, *Wings of Air America*, p.73, where the aircraft is erroneously attributed to Air America, but looks more like XW-TAJ), and Rapide XW-TBI (msn ?) was probably acquired in 1963 or 1964 (Burnett/Slack/Davis, *South-East Asia Civil Aircraft Registers*, pp.234/5).

\(^{58}\) A Memorandum dated 21 October 64 written by D. J. Godar, Air America’s General Manager Laos, calls Véha-Akat “A French airline [...] which operates C-47s on a non scheduled basis. Their aircraft operate out of Vientiane and have been seen in Saigon on a number of occasions” (in: UTD/Hickler/B8F8). Known Véha-Akat C-47s include XW-PDA (msn ?), seen at Vientiane on 21 May 66, XW-PAR (msn ?), seen there on 24 September 65, C-47 XW-PDL (msn ?), which crashed on 25 July 1967 (see below) and what seems to be (see the photo above) XW-PCP (msn 2010, said to be ex B-1533 and N155A, repainted at Vientiane as XW-PCP by 29 December 65) (List of aircraft seen by Dr. Jonathan Pote in Laos, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 8 August 2008 by Dr. Pote). After the crash in February 61, China Airlines had sent 2 more C-47s to Laos (Fu / Pocock, *The Black Bats*, p.102).
near Luang Prabang while circling in the air, waiting for better weather to land at Luang Prabang; all 16 people who were on board of this scheduled passenger flight from Vientiane to Luang Prabang were killed.\textsuperscript{59} This may have been the end of Véha-Akat Airlines, as a list

\textsuperscript{59} Véha-Akat C-47 XW-PDL was leased from Taiwan Airways B-112 (Accident Description in: \textit{Aviation Safety Network Laos}, in: \url{http://www.aviation-safety.net/database/1967/670725-1.htm}).
of competitive aircraft published by Air America on 1 June 1968 does no longer mention the company. Their Norseman F-LAAD was sold to Edgerton and Sons in April 69 and subsequently became N3099. The FAA file of Noorduyn UC-64A Norseman N3099 (msn 643, ex 44-70378) gives the following history: “CofR #193340 13-Oct-55 (or regd 05-Jul-55

Letter dated 21 April 69 written by Phagna Oun Sananikone of Véha Akat, documenting the sale of their Noorduyn UC-64A Norseman msn 643, former F-LAAD, to Edgerton and Sons, College, AK, kindly submitted by Steve Darke.

as F-LAAD) to Véha-Akat Airlines; sold by Véha-Akat to Edgerton & Sons (College, Ak.) 21-Apr-69; fuselage & wings completely recovered & other maintenance work carried out by Véha-Akat in Vientiane on behalf of Edgerton & Sons & completed 21-Oct-69; F-LAAD
canx 26-Mar-70 by DGAC as ‘sold abroad’; to N3099; letter from R. S. Edgerton (Continental Air Services Inc, San Francisco, CA.) 17-Apr-70 to FAA requesting N-marks; Application for Registration by Edgerton & Sons as N3099 17-Apr-70; TT 5391.20 hrs at 15-Jun-70; CofA issued 25-Jun-70; BoS from Edgerton & Sons to Charles W. Heckman (Queens Village, NY, but with a correspondence address of Vientiane, Laos) 02-Sep-71; Application for Registration by Charles W. Heckman 02-Sep-71; Triennial Aircraft Registration Report 27-Aug-84 has a note by Heckman stating ‘Confiscated in Communist takeover of Vientiane’; canx 13-Dec-84.”61

61 E-mail dated 3 December 2013, kindly sent to the author by Steve Darke.
5) Air America’s cooperation with VIAT or Vietnamese Air Transport:

In the early sixties, the official presence of the United States was still rather thin in South Vietnam, but, since 1961, Air America had very close relations with a South Vietnamese company called VIAT, a cover for CIA activities, which it helped to build up. 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 personnel, as may be called by VIAT. 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”.

Already on 9 March 61, President Kennedy had urged the CIA and the Department of Defense to launch guerrilla operations into Viet Minh territory. In the late summer of 1961, help came from the 1045th Operational Evaluation & Training Group of Kadena, Okinawa, a USAF unit commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Harry C. “Heinie” Aderholt reporting directly to CIA headquarters: Upon the request of Saigon’s CIA station chief William Colby, Lieutenant Colonel Aderholt sent Ed Smith of Detachment 2 to Saigon to organize a training program in low-level night navigation and penetration for the men of the 1st Transport Squadron of the South Vietnamese Air Force, commanded by Major Nguyen Cao Ky. The group consisted of some twenty South Vietnamese trainees, and the trainers were Air America pilot Al Judkins and Air America navigator Jim Keck who taught them 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. 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 or large tail insignia (p.18). Apparently, these South Vietnamese C-47s also flew cross-border missions into Laos in the spring of 1961, parachuting near Tchepone spy teams who were to watch the Ho Chi Minh Trail. 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 it’s forth mission, VIAT C-47 B-809 was shot down in Ninh Binh Province on 1 July 61.

62 Fax dated 7 August 2000 kindly sent to the author by Brigadier General Aderholt.
65 The insignia of Detachment 2 / 1045 OE & TG are depicted at Conboy / Morrison, Shadow war, p.77.
66 Trest, Air Commando One, pp.83-85.
67 Trest, Air Commando One, p.111.
68 The manuscript of these memoirs was kindly supplied to the author by Jim Keck.
69 Conboy / Morrison, Shadow war, p.116+120.
70 Conboy / Andradé, Spies and commandos, pp.33-41 and 317, note 2; Ahern, The way we do things, pp.13-15.
The remains of C-47 B-809, photographed at the Air Defense Museum, Hanoi, in October 2005 by Pedro Fuster (with kind permission from Pedro Fuster)

At some time in 1961, VIAT introduced 2 C-46s to transport agents and arms into North Vietnam, and on the first C-46 mission, Colonel Ngo The Linh and Major Nguyen Cao Ky flew themselves to North Vietnam to check the situation. The C-46s came from China Airlines and were flown by China Airlines crews. William Colby himself had admitted

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72 China Airlines’ C-46D B-1517 (msn 33028) first became XV-NIF, but was reregistered as XV-NII around February 62; their C-46D B-1513 (msn 33017) became XV-NIG (for details see the C-46 file of this database).

73 E-mail dated 5 April 2004, kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu.
that he had set up VIAT as a private company with pilots from Taiwan (instead of pilots from Air America) in order to make believe that the Governments of the United States and of South Vietnam were not involved. The following year, in 1962, VIAT also received most of their 6 Helio Couriers, all of which ended up with Air America a couple of years later, although some of them passed thru the hands of other companies working for the CIA like

Boun Oum Airways and the Indian ARC. A China Airlines pilot who flew for VIAT

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74 E-mail dated 30 July 2004, kindly sent to the author by John Wiren.
75 Helio H-395s XV-NAE (msn 530, ex N4179D, to Boun Oum XW-PBS in May 64); XV-NAF (msn 567, ex N1013, to Air America B-877 in February 65); XV-NAG (msn 543, ex N4187D, to Air America XW-PBX in September 64); XV-NAH (msn 544, ex N4189D, to Air America B-875 in September 64); XV-NAI (msn 568, ex N1014, to ARC VT-DRK via Marathon Aviation N48702 in 1963); and XV-NAJ (msn 531, ex N4180D, to Air America XW-PCD in October 64). For further details see the Helio Courier file of this database.
remembered that those VIAT Helios were all flown by Turkish pilots; their wives were allowed to stay with them. What we know about this part of VIAT’s fleet, mainly comes from 2 photos of VIAT’s Mission Board, where one of the columns gives the identities of the aircraft, and from Air Asia’s Properties list of 31 March 65. After the loss of the C-47, which had always to be refuelled at Danang when inserting agents into North Vietnam, the CIA decided that VIAT’s new aircraft was to be a C-54. Probably in August 1961, Air America delivered their C-54A B-1002 (msn 3078) to VIAT by Conditional Sale Contract no. 61-079 – a Memorandum by Air America’s Assistant Legal Counsel Jerry Fink, dated 11 October 1961, discusses whether the aircraft should be cancelled from Air America’s aircraft liability insurance or not –, where it was subsequently reregistered as XV-NUB.

Once again, in late 1961, Air America’s Al Judkins and Jim Keck returned to Saigon to train the Vietnamese crews in low-level flying and navigation. Flight training on the new C-54 ended in early 1962, and on 20 January 62, VIAT’s C-54 departed Saigon’s Tan Son Nhut airport and dropped a team of five agents, code-named “Europa” into Hoa Binh Province in

VIAT’s Mission Board, probably taken in late 1961 and around February 1962 (photos by Capt. Su-ching Tai, kindly submitted by Clarence Fu)

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76 “There were I believe 5 Turks to fly the Helios, I remember that one tore up a Helio on the 10,000 runway in Saigon, and I don’t recall if they received another.” (E-mail dated 24 October 2009, kindly sent to the author by George Taylor).
77 E-mail dated 1 April 2004, kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu.
78 Ahern, *The way we do things*, p.23.
79 Cf. Conboy / Andradé, *Spies and commandos*, p.44.
80 For contract no. 61-079 see Contract list of 27 July 62, in: UTD/Fink/B2F16.
81 In: UTD/Fink/B2F15.
82 In the photo of the second Mission Board shown above, the identity of C-54 XV-NUB is given as “3078”. George Taylor recalls: “I remember the aircraft had a tail number that you could still see where the paint was removed that was CAT 02.” (E-mail dated 24 October 2009, kindly sent to the author by George Taylor).
83 As Jim Keck recalls (pp.22-24), this time, training included the use of radar, and two crews were ready, when the Air America team left Saigon (The manuscript of these memoirs of Jim Keck, kindly supplied to the author by Jim Keck himself).
84 Former Air America navigator Jim Keck recalls: “Many times we would go out to sea about thirty miles, stay low, say about 100 feet and make “coast ins” (crossing the coast of South Vietnam) at a precise point. They became fairly good at this” (e-mail dated 2 February 2002, kindly sent to the author by Jim Keck).
central North Vietnam. But a couple of days later, misfortune struck again, when on a resupply flight to team “Castor” in late February or on 1 March 1962, VIAT’s C-54 crashed into a mountain during bad weather. \(^{86}\)

It was not until 4 January 62, that Vietnamese Air Transport signed contract no. 61-119 with Air America, and this contract does not only provide for “utilizing contractor’s pilots, co-pilots, flight navigators, flight engineers, flight radio operators and aerial flight specialists, as necessary, to ferry and otherwise operate Customer’s aircraft, and to augment the normal [...] flight crews on Contractor’s aircraft as may be called for, as Contractor agrees to provide such personnel services, within its capability, as may be called for by the Customer from time to time, and [...] utilizing contractor’s ground personnel, including but not limited to flight operations, maintenance and supply personnel to provide services for which they are qualified, and Contractor agrees to provide such personnel services, within its capabilities, as may be called for by the Customer from time to time” \(^{87}\) that is for Air America’s flight, ground, supply and maintenance personnel as may be called for by VIAT. In the same contract, Air America also agreed to furnish aircraft flying services using C-46, C-47, DC-4, DC-6, Helio Courier, Bell 47G-2 Helicopter, Piper Apache, and Beechcraft type aircraft within the Southeast Asia area as may be called for from time to time. Supplemental Agreement no.1 dated 10 November 1962 adds to this contract that the “aircraft services set forth therein so as to include Dornier Do-28, and De Havilland DHC-4A (Caribou) type aircraft services.” \(^{88}\) The Supplemental Agreement also lists the rates to be paid for each type

\(^{86}\) Conboy / Andradé, Spies and commandos, pp.44/5; Ahern, The way we do things, p.12. However, officially B-1002 was “sold” to VIAT only on 1 September 63 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept. 1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1) – as VIAT did no longer fly any C-54s in September 63, that was probably only the date when the property titles of B-1002 officially passed to VIAT after Air America had received the last payment, or it was simply a trick that was to make believe that the C-54 that had crashed in North Vietnam was another one.

\(^{87}\) Contract no. 61-119 dated 4 January 61, p.1, in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no.28.

\(^{88}\) Contract no. 61-119, Supplemental Agreement no.1 dated 10 November 62, in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no.28.
of aircraft and that “the Customer shall pay for a minimum of 150 flying hours for each calendar quarter-year period [...] for each aircraft called for and assigned under this agreement [...]”\(^89\) It is unknown how often VIAT really utilized one of Air America’s aircraft. Former Air America pilot George Taylor, who was based at Saigon at that time, recalls: “We did at times fly for the customer with a DO-28 that we had at that time and it was on the VIAT request,"\(^90\) All this makes believe that the aircraft flying services that Air America agreed to furnish to Vietnamese Air Transport “as necessary” were just something like a reserve fleet that VIAT could rely on in case one of VIAT’s own aircraft was shot down, and as Air America would furnish such an aircraft “within its capabilities”, the contract had to include a large selection of different aircraft types. Apparently in order to underline that VIAT was just a commercial airline and nothing else, in his letter to the FAA dated 1 November 63, Air America’s President Hugh Grundy pointed out that contract no. 61-119 of 4 January 62 did first of all cover “furnishing on a call basis flying services of C-46, C-47, DC-4, DC-6, Helio Courier, Bell 47G-2, Piper Apache and Beechcraft, Dornier Do-28 and DHC-4A type aircraft” and only thereafter mentions that the contract also covered “additional flight and ground personnel in Southeast Asia area.”\(^91\)

But VIAT did not need such a large fleet: “The Helios were used by VIAT for about a year and a half.”\(^92\) As early as 15 July 62, Aviation Investors Inc. of Saigon/Washington DC, the holding company behind VIAT, dry leased VIAT’s Helio Courier XV-NAJ to Air America as “531” for use in Laos until 14 July 63,\(^93\) and it actually remained with Air America until it was sold in the Philippines in 1974.\(^94\) In 1963, 2 more Helios left VIAT: XV-NAI became N48702 with Marathon Aviation and then VT-DRK with the Indian ARC, and XV-NAE was leased to Air America in November 63 and later to Boun Oum Airways.\(^95\) After VIAT’s C-54 XV-NUB had crashed into a mountain during bad weather in late February or on 1 March 1962,\(^96\) it was not Air America who could give them another C-54. With the help of Lieutenant Colonel Aderholt’s 1045\(^{th}\) OETG, VIAT received another C-54 in March 62 – this time one of the aircraft operated by the 1045\(^{th}\) OETG, probably 45-558\(^97\) –

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89 Contract no. 61-119, Supplemental Agreement no.1 dated 10 November 62, in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no.28.
90 E-mail dated 24 October 2009, kindly sent to the author by George Taylor.
92 E-mail dated 24 October 2009, kindly sent to the author by George Taylor.
93 Status as of 28 March 74, in: UTD/CIA/B56F4.
94 For details see the Helio file of The Aircraft of Air America.
95 For details see the Helio file of The Aircraft of Air America.
96 Conboy / Andráde, Spies and commandos, pp.44/5.
97 According to Haas, Apollo’s warriors, in 1952, the 581\(^{st}\) ARCW (Air Resupply and Communications Wing), Clark, among others, had 2 C-118s and 2 C-54s, which were reserved for special missions, some for the CIA (pp.80/1). When on 8 Sept. 53, USAF reduced the 581\(^{st}\) ARCW to group size, they still had those 4 special mission aircraft (2 C-118s and 2 C-54s). In October 54, the group moved from Clark to Okinawa, and in September 56, the 581\(^{st}\) was officially deactivated, and the remaining aircraft transferred to the 322\(^{nd}\) Troop Carrier Squadron (Medium) (Special) (pp.92/3). When the 322\(^{nd}\) TCS itself ceased to exist in November 57, only that Kadena-based special cell (Detachment 1) of the 322\(^{nd}\) TCS survived (Conboy / Morrison, The CIA’s secret war in Tibet, p.271, note 17). This became Detachment 2, 313\(^{th}\) Air Division, and then Detachment 2, 1045\(^{th}\) Operational Evaluation & Training Group (OETG), reporting directly to the CIA (Trest, Air Commando One, p.83). One of those special mission C-54s was C-54D 42-72523, which left the 581\(^{st}\) ASL Group (= 581\(^{st}\) ARCW), Kadena in 1956 to an unknown unit, but reappeared in 1961 as a participant in the Bay of Pigs operation, when Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez asked the Panama DGA to cancel its registration HP-321-P in October 61 (Letter dated 24 October 61, sent by the DGAC Panama to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez, in:
and this time, the pilots were to be volunteers of China Airlines who had previously served with the Republic of China Air Force. Once again, two Air America navigators – including Ken Rockwell – trained the crews, this time on Taiwan. The cover story was that they were South Vietnamese commercial pilots, so the registration was probably a civilian one – probably XV-NUE. Between February and May 62, the Chinese crews were trained on Taiwan, apparently in their new C-54. In May 62, the Chinese crews and their new C-54 were ready, and in May 62, VIAT’s C-54 flew from Taiwan to South Vietnam. So Captain Su-Chin Tai and other China Airlines crew members flew the VIAT C-54 in civilian clothes, and they were given Vietnamese names to cover their real identities. Air America’s George Taylor, who was stationed at Saigon at that time, reports that there was some resistance from the South Vietnamese Air Force, as they thought that it should be them to fly the C-54. But nothing came out of it. Known drops flown by this second VIAT C-54 into North Vietnam included teams “Tourbillon” (May 62), “Eros” (May 62), “Tarzan” (6 January 63), “Pegasus” (12 April 63), and other teams in May 63 and on 8 June 63. After the C-123Bs had arrived in June 63, the C-54 was to be phased out, but on its last mission, after dropping team “Packer” on 4 July 63, the aircraft disappeared: Probably it had hit a mountain. Clarence P. Fu confirms that crash date from Chinese sources. But in June 63, there was so much need for transportation that during that month Republic of China Air Force crews flew a RoCAF C-54 on loan to VIAT on missions into North Vietnam. Probably, the RoCAF C-54 that flew for VIAT in June 63 used the registration XV-NUF during its flights into North Vietnam. It is difficult to identify VIAT’s last 2 C-54s. Several identities have been discussed.

UTD/Bisson/B microfilm reel 4). The identity of the second original special mission C-54 is unknown, but it probably was C-54G 45-558, which left the USAF at Clark in 1957 and went to “Top Secret” (Microfilm reel no. ACA-11, preserved at the AFHRA, Maxwell AFB). According to Trest (Air Commando One, p.85), there were 3 C-54s at Kadena in January 60 – possibly including the aircraft normally assigned to the 6313th Air Base Wing at Kadena (in mid-1960, this was C-54D 42-72694, a former 581st ARCW aircraft; see Microfilm reels nos. ACA-2 and 3) or the former Foshing C-54 confiscated in 1958 (see below). And in an interview conducted by Prof. William Leary at Fort Walton Beach, FL 28-30 August 1990 (in: UTD/Leary/B68F9), General Aderholt said that Detachment 2 had even 5 C-54s in the early sixties. In 1966, Detachment 2, 1045th OETG still had one C-54 (e-mail dated 26 April 2004, kindly sent to the author by General Aderholt). All this could mean that the VIAT C-54 that crashed on 4 July 63 was one of the C-54s that had belonged to Det.2, 1045th OETG. A photo of 45-558 taken at Taipei or Tainan probably in 1962 and showing the aircraft being repainted in an unusual color scheme (photo kindly sent to the author by Leif Hellström on 20 July 2011) makes believe that this was the CIA C-54 destined to become VIAT’s second C-54.

98 Conboy / Andradé, Spies and Commandos, p.49.
99 “The VIAT pilot Mr. Tai told me that the VIAT C-54 was flown from Taipei to Vietnam for the first time. He was on that plane and there was another passenger, Nguyen Cao Ky” (e-mail dated 25 February 2009, kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu).
100 E-mail dated 6 May 2004, kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu.
101 After VIAT’s first C-54 went down, “the Vietnamese Air Force in the form of Nguyen Cao Ky, raised hell stating that the Vietnamese Pilots could and should fly the DC-4 rather than the Nationalist Chinese. One of our Air America pilots, [A.L.] Judkins, […] came to Saigon and checked out some South Vietnamese crews on the DC-4. But once the aircraft came under Ky’s command, he had it reconfigured into a VIP airplane for himself. This is where it received its Vietnamese tail number XV NUE. Judkins and some others had to return to Saigon sometime later and at night steal the aircraft and bring it back over to the Air America side of the airport” (e-mail dated 26 October 2009, kindly sent to the author by George Taylor).
102 Ahern, The way we do things, p.25.
103 Conboy / Andradé, Spies and Commandos, pp.46-49, 59-61; Ahern, The way we do things, p.44.
104 E-mail dated 17 March 2005, kindly sent to the author.
105 Conboy / Andradé, Spies and Commandos, p.59.
in the C-54 file of *The Aircraft of Air America*, and this discussion cannot be repeated here in detail. As, apparently, Detachment 2, 1045th OETG, had 5 C-54s in the early sixties, but only one C-54 in 1966. VIAT’s second C-54, that is the aircraft that crashed on 4 July 63, must have been one of those who were never seen again – most probably 45-558. VIAT’s third C-54 was former RoCAF “54002” and “C-54002” – that is CIA C-54G 45-577, which had been transferred from CIA stocks in the US to South East Asia in August 61.

As has been mentioned above, VIAT’s new workhorse was the Fairchild C-123B. Already in September 62, 30 RoCAF airmen sponsored by CIA started training on the C-123 at Pope AFB in North Carolina. In February 63 five gray, unmarked C-123s, which were owned by the CIA, were delivered to the Republic of China Air Force (RoCAF) under the condition that two of them were flown by RoCAF crews on infiltration and resupply missions into North Vietnam. “Their crews, having finished the basic program in the United States, spent the next several months perfecting their techniques in low-level night flying and the use of the planes ECM gear.” On 15 June 63, two of the four remaining C-123s – one C-123 had crashed in Taiwan in a training accident – departed for Saigon. Here, the Chinese crews were trained in low level flying by Air America pilot Johnny Lee and Air America navigator Jim Keck. The C-123 operations were directed by USAF officer Bill Rose. “The first

106 According to the interview conducted by Prof. William Leary with General Aderholt at Fort Walton Beach, FL 28-30 August 1990 (in: UTD/Leary/B68F9).
107 E-mail dated 26 April 2004, kindly sent to the author by General Aderholt.
108 C-54G 45-558 (msn 36011) probably was the one that was impounded in Mexico on 28 September 60 (see my file *Air America at the Bay of Pigs*); it was still impounded in October 61 (“Inspector General’s Survey of the Cuban Operation”, dated October 1961, CIA document no. 129914, online published on the CIA website at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000129914.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000129914.pdf), no.1, p.98, that is p.106 on the website), but returned to Southeast Asia. A photo of 45-558 taken at Taipei or Tainan probably in 1962 and showing the aircraft being repainted in an unusual color scheme (photo kindly sent to the author by Leif Hellström on 20 July 2011) makes believe that this was the CIA C-54 destined to become VIAT’s second C-54. Other candidates are former *Bay of Pigs C-54D 42-72523* (This aircraft seems to have been converted to C-54G, as in his letter dated 24 October 61 to Los Hermanos Sebastían y Gómez, the Director General de Aeronáutica Civil of Panama [in: UTD/Bisson/B microfilm reel 4] lists 42-72523 as a C-54G) and former Foshing Airlines B-1406, that is C-54E 42-72367.
109 C-54G 45-577 is mentioned in CIA document no. DPD-3361-61, released on 14 August 2002, as being an “Agency-owned C-54G” transferred from the US to South East Asia in August 61 (document sent by Leif Hellström to Clarence Fu, who kindly forwarded it to the author on 16 February 2011). For the whole period from 1955 to 1973, there is no trace of 45-577 in the USAF Aircraft Assignment Records (Microfilm reel nos. ACA-11 and AVH-1 to AVH-19). This aircraft became “C-54002” (no.2) or “54002” with the RoCAF in August 1961 and then B-1803 with China Airlines in July 64 (e-mail dated 17 February 2011, kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu).
110 Ahern, *The way we do things*, p.44.
111 The five CIA C-123Bs are believed to have been: 55-4543 (msn 20204) and 55-4551 (msn 20212), both transferred to an unknown MAP on 10 April 63, as well as 54-0643 (msn 20092), 54-0657 (msn 20106), and 54-0715 (msn 20164), all of which left 464TCW, Pope AFB, to an unknown operator on 6 May 63; for further details see the C-123 file of my *The aircraft of Air America*.
112 Ahern, *The way we do things*, p.44.
113 RoCAF C-123B “4020” alias 55-4551 crashed into a mountain during a night training flight on Taiwan on 10 May 63, killing 12 people (e-mails dated 14 April 2004 and 29 July 2007, kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu).
114 Conboy / Andradé, *Spies and commandos*, pp.60/1.
115 Manuscript of the memoirs of Jim Keck, p. 25, kindly supplied to the author by Jim Keck himself; e-mail dated 2 February 2002 kindly sent to the author by Jim Keck.
operational deployment from South Vietnam took place on 2 July, with the insertion of team “Giant” at a DZ in the mountains west of the panhandle city of Vinh.”\(^{117}\) When the VIAT C-54 vanished over North Vietnam on 4 July 63, the RoCAF C-123s were the only way to airdrop agents into North Vietnam.\(^{118}\) On 24 January 64, the four CIA/RoCAF C-123s came under the control of the Department of Defense,\(^{119}\) which, that same day, had formed the Special Operations Group (SOG) under the direct supervision of the Chief of Staff, MACV, but the infiltration flights continued to be carried out by Chinese crews. The military unit that the original four C-123Bs had been transferred to in January 64 was MACV-SOG, that is Military Assistance Command Vietnam – Special Operations Group, renamed Studies and Observations Group in the second half of 1964.\(^{120}\) Also after January 64, that is after the program had been taken over by MACV-SOG, Air America’s John Lee remained chief instructor of the RoCAF pilots: “Lee flew to Saigon with aircraft in late November 1963. The first mission was launched from Danang on December 4. Other missions followed during the first six months of 1964, mostly into North Vietnam from Danang, and a few from Taiwan to Hainan. Most of the time, however, was spent in training and standby. […] In June 1964, Lee requested transfer to Tachikawa. Ben Coleman took over program. […] He was replaced by Gordon V. Smith. The project terminated shortly thereafter.”\(^{121}\) During the second half of 1964, the original four C-123s inherited from the CIA were replaced or joined by six C-123s modified with improved electronics and advanced Doppler navigation, the first of which had arrived by August 64 together with new air crews who had been trained in Florida: seven Chinese and three Vietnamese crews.\(^{122}\) This second group of C-123Bs was called Project “Duck Hook”. The Chinese crews were just given a new project designation: While the China Airlines crews who had flown for VIAT had been assigned to project “Nan Hsing” (“Southern Star”), the crews who flew the originally CIA-owned C-123Bs were assigned to project “Nan Hsing No. 2”, and the new “Duck Hook” crews were assigned to project “Nan Hsing No. 3”.\(^{123}\) But as all this had by now become a US military operation, its subsequent history is no longer linked to VIAT.

The main purpose of Vietnamese Air Transport was of course to insert agents into North Vietnam and to resupply them – all this is described in the books by Conboy / Andradé\(^{124}\) and Ahern\(^{125}\). So VIAT C-54s, C-46s, and C-123s were used to drop supplies, psywar material, 

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117 Ahern, The way we do things, p.44.
118 Conboy / Andradé, Spies and commandos, pp.58-61 + 291, notes 11 and 12.
119 At this time, 27 CIA-sponsored teams, that is more than 200 men, had been dropped (Conboy / Andradé, Spies and commandos, p. vii).
120 Conboy / Andradé, Spies and Commandos, pp.92/3 and 296, note 9; Ahern, The way we do things, p.52.
121 John E. Lee, interview given to William Leary on 27 May 1987, summary preserved at UTD/Leary/B46F10.
122 These 6 C-123Bs are believed to have been: 56-4377 (msn 20261), 54-641 (msn 20090), 54-704 (msn 20153), 55-4522 (msn 20183), 56-4356 (msn 20240), and 55-4528 (msn 20189). 56-4355 (msn 20239) may have been intended for use by MACV-SOG, but crashed before being taken over; for further details see the C-123 file of my The aircraft of Air America.
123 E-mail dated 5 August 2007, kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu.
leaflets, pre-tuned radios, listening devices, as well as parachuting long-term agents and commandos into North Vietnam. But VIAT’s aircraft were also used on sensitive flights within South Vietnam at the will of the CIA’s Saigon station. So VIAT’s Helios certainly had to fly around CIA case officers or US military advisors and Special Forces sent secretly to South Vietnam by President Kennedy from 1961 onwards, as Air America did in Laos. VIAT aircraft are also believed to have been used to support CIA-financed programs of the South Vietnamese government. Already in 1957, the Eisenhower Administration had initiated a covert assistance program jointly run by the CIA and the Department of Defense to create a South Vietnamese special forces unit, called the 1st Observation Group, which was placed under the Presidential Liaison Office; its function was to act as a guerrilla cadre behind communist lines in the wake of a Chinese-led invasion. As only 1,200 to 1,600 out of 16,000 Americans serving in South Vietnam between 1960 and 1962 were combat-effective men, the remaining 14,000 men were support troops working under the operational control of the CIA. Another such program was the “Strategic Hamlets”, the successor to the “Agrovilles”-program that had been begun in 1959. The “Strategic Hamlets”-program was started in November 61, and the first of them had been finished in March 62, while more than 8,000 “Strategic Hamlets” had been built by September 63. Possibly, VIAT aircraft also delivered food and medicine as directed by President Diem’s “Extended Arms of Brotherhood” program, which cared for tribesmen willing to collaborate with the Saigon government. But the most important program VIAT was involved in was probably the support of the CIDG (Civilian Irregular Defense Group) project. Since late 1961, US Army Special Forces teams worked together with a group of hill tribes living in the central highlands of South Vietnam, called “Montagnards.” 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. Initially, these camps were supplied by USAF “Farm Gate” C-47s 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. 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. South Vietnamese support was provided by the Presidential Survey Office. “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 mainly VIAT’s C-46s, and C-123s. As the CIA’s Combined Studies Division also established border surveillance

127 Conboy / Andradé, Spies and commandos, pp.18/9.
132 Bowers, Tactical airlift, p.149.
133 Conboy / Andradé, Spies and commandos, p.86.
134 Bowers, Tactical airlift, p.150.
sites that were responsible for screening and reconnoitering the Laotian and Cambodian border areas, this task was assigned to the CIDGs in late 1963, and it is believed that VIAT’s aircraft also served for that purpose. Between 1963 and 1965, US Special Forces recruited even ethnic Cambodians to form additional light guerilla companies. These “Khmer Krom” or “Lower Khmer” units were deployed at South Vietnamese CIDG camps along the border to Cambodia. And there were even more secret cross-border operations that VIAT was involved in – like airborne training of South Vietnamese commandos of Project Typhoon for operations in Southern Laos as well as infiltrating them into enemy country. It is known that South Vietnamese Montagnard groups aimed at intelligence against North Vietnamese infiltration in southern Laos on the Ho-Chi-Minh-Trail were supplied by “Vietnamese aircraft, unmarked”, which evidently meant VIAT. In any case, as President Diem did not want an official presence of US military in South Vietnam, the CIA helped to hide its own role within these South Vietnamese government programs by helping to create a “Father of his Country” in the person of President Ngo Dinh Diem.

VIAT came to its end, when the United States decided to no longer hide their presence in South Vietnam. When, beginning in mid-1963, the US military slowly pushed VIAT out of business, some of their Helios passed 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 Helio XV-NAG had gone to Air Asia in July 64, only 2 Helios owned by Aviation Investors Inc. remained with VIAT: XV-NAF and XV-NAH. Both Helios were handed over to Air America at Saigon on 1 August 1964 as part of the agreement dated 25 September 64, by which Air Asia bought the whole former Saigon properties of Aviation Investors Inc. and Vietnamese Air Transport, that is a building on leased ground, airborne radios, repairable aircraft components, ground service equipment, vehicles, office furniture and equipment. On 31 October 1964, Aviation Investors’ Saigon operations were closed, so that Aviation Investors’

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137 Conboy / Morrison, *Early covert action on to the Ho Chi Minh Trail*, p.3.
138 A memorandum dated 29 April 64, sent by the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Bundy) to the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman) first speaks of “Evidence of Greatly Increased Use of Route 12-a from Southern NVN to Muong Phine Area near Tchepeone” and then proposes the use of agents in Laos and of patrols, that is “1) units of 50-100 men, 2) not in GVN or other uniforms, but plausibly deniable Montagnard or local groups, 3) aimed at intelligence, with any military action confined to self-defense, [...] 5) Aerial resupply to be permitted, but by Vietnamese aircraft, unmarked” (US Dept. of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, vol. XXVIII, Laos, document 42, in: [http://www.state.gov/about_state/history/vol_xxviii/35_44.html](http://www.state.gov/about_state/history/vol_xxviii/35_44.html)). These unmarked Vietnamese aircraft evidently were VIAT planes.
142 Helios “531” and “530” – see the Helio file of *The Aircraft of Air America*.
144 Conboy / Andradé, *Spies and Commandos*, p.59; e-mail dated 5 April 2004, kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu.
145 See Air Asia Properties list of 31 March 65, in: UTD/CIA/B26F5.
reminder dated 31 December 64 was sent to Air Asia from their Washington office. After

The sale of Aviation Investors’ properties: Receipt of 2 Helios, Bill of Sale, and Reminder (in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 28)

VIAT’s remaining 2 Helios had been disposed of and after all VIAT activities had been terminated on 30 November 64, the door to South Vietnam was open for Air America.

146 Receipt of 2 Helios dated 8 September 64, Bill of Sale dated 25 September 64, and Letter dated 31 December 64, in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 28; see also: Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committees of Air Asia Co Ltd and Air America Inc. of 29 September 64, in: UTD/CIA/B7F3; Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committees of Air Asia Co Ltd and Air America Inc. of 6 April 1965, in: UTD/CIA/B7F4.

6) Air America’s cooperation with Air Ventures Inc

Air Ventures Inc. of Suite 804, 888 17th Street NW, Washington (formerly of 300 Madison Avenue, New York) was a small outfit that also had a South East Asia office at Bangkok. As it seems, the company was first mentioned by Christopher Robbins: “To help support the Tibetan operation, the CIA established an air proprietary in the mountain kingdom of Nepal which shares a long frontier with Tibet. An AID contract was awarded to a Delaware corporation called Air Ventures, Inc., between 1963 and 1967, ostensibly to assist a telecommunications project within the country. Air Ventures flew charters for the Nepalese government while covertly supporting the CIA-trained guerrillas inside Tibet.” But this seems to have been only an intention: In November 62, a Southern Air Transport DC-6 piloted by Neese Hicks made three shuttles between Takhli in Thailand and Charbatia airfield in eastern India, bringing in an assortment of military aid for building up a Tibetan resistance force. As things went very slowly in India, in the fall of 1963, the CIA established Air Ventures Inc. inside Nepal to do the airlift. But then in late 1963 the US and India found a way to cooperate by creating the Aviation Research Center (ARC), an intelligence joint venture between the CIA and the Indian Intelligence Bureau, on 7 September 63, so that Air Ventures did not have to make covert supply drops. In August 64, Air Ventures Inc. of Washington, DC received Helio H-500 Twin Courier N10034 (msn 4), which was turned over to the Government of India as VT-DVM in December 67. And somehow, Air Ventures seems to have still been involved in the CIA’s Tibetan program, as a senior Chinese official, who had secretly defected to Kathmandu, Nepal, was flown to Charbatia by Air Ventures helicopter pilot Jerome McEntee. Indeed, effective 1 December 63, Air America pilot Jerome A. McEntee was employed by Air Ventures under an 18-month contract by Letter contract dated 2 January 64 between Air America and Air Ventures. Most of this Letter contract speaks about certain benefits during his employment with Air Ventures. By letter agreement dated 20 April 65, Air Ventures confirms to Air America that Jerome McEntee will remain with Air Ventures until 30 June 67. On 12 August 65, Air America informed Air Ventures that the regular payment of Air America pilots had been risen and asked Air Ventures to do the same with the payment received by Mr. McEntee. The second Air America helicopter pilot to fly with Air Ventures was Elmer L. Munsell, who was employed by Air Ventures effective 10 June 64 under an 18-month contract by Letter contract dated 12 November 64 between Air America and Air Ventures. Again, much of this Letter contract

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149 Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA’s secret war in Tibet*, pp. 174 and 284.
150 Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA’s secret war in Tibet*, pp.190/1. In May 1964, a CIA U-2 took off from Charbatia Air Base, performed a spy mission over Xinjiang Province of Red China, and rolled off the end of the runway after it had touched down again at Charbatia; hastily manhandled into a hanger, it was later repaired, and then discreetly flown out without attempting further overflights from Indian territory (*Conboy / Kohli, Spies in the Himalayas*, pp. 23/4).
151 Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA’s secret war in Tibet*, pp.196/7.
154 Air Ventures, Letter contract of 2 January 64 with Air America, Washington, in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 28.
155 Air Ventures, Letter agreement of 20 April 65 with Air America, in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 28.
156 Air America, letter of 12 August 65 to Air Ventures, in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 28.
speaks about certain benefits during his employment with Air Ventures.\footnote{Air Ventures, Letter contract of 12 November 64 with Air America, Washington, in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 28.} By letter agreement dated 20 April 65, Air Ventures confirms to Air America that Elmer Munsell will remain with Air Ventures until 30 June 67.\footnote{Air Ventures, Letter agreement of 20 April 65 with Air America, in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 28.} On 12 July 65, Air America asked Air Ventures to adjust Mr. Munsell’s payment to the new standard payment for Air America pilots.\footnote{Air America, letter of 12 July 65 to Air Ventures, in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 28.} But by his letter of 25 October 66, Elmer Munsell informed Air America that he planned to remain with Air Ventures and desired to sever his connections with Air America effective 31 October 66.\footnote{Elmer Munsell, correspondence with Air America, in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 28.}

As Elmer Munsell’s log book is preserved at the Air America Archives,\footnote{Elmer Munsell, Log book, at: UTD/Munsell/B3F24.} we know that his last flight in Nepal was on 8 April 67 and that he again became an Air America helicopter pilot from 19 July 68 onwards. During his time in Nepal, he was mostly based at the capital Kathmandu, and between 21 July 64 and 8 April 67, he flew the company’s three Bell 47G helicopters, i.e. N48864 (msn 2611, model G-3, which was transferred to Air America around November 65), N73973 (msn 2887, model G3-B1), and since 7 May 65 also N1197W (msn 2951, model G3-B1). However, the log book does not say anything about the type of flying. The only photo preserved of Munsell’s flying in Nepal (UTD treasures no. 1-EM3-17-PC9) shows him and his Bell 47 surrounded by high and snowy mountains.

Letter agreements for Air America pilots J. McEntee and E. Munsell (extracts only) (in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no.28)
7) The cooperation with Bird & Sons:

Bird & Sons was a small contract operator founded in the mid-fifties by William Bird, the head of a construction firm of California that began operating in mainland South East Asia in 1958 and employed about fifty-five pilots who flew a variety of small and medium transport planes. Although their official address was 808 Seaboard Building, 4th Avenue and Pike, Seattle, and later 120 Montgomery Street, San Francisco, CA, their aircraft operated out of Udorn and Vientiane. These aircraft included between 20 and 25 smaller ones, some of which had STOL capacities. Known are an unidentified Beech AT-11, a Camair 480, two Wren 460s, i.e. STOL modified Cessna 182Gs (N2449R msn 182-55549, and N3790U msn 182-55190), two Helio Couriers acquired in May 64 (XW-PBS msn 530, and XW-PBT msn 566), at least 9, if not 10 PC-6 Porters acquired from Pilatus AG since 1962. Beech

Bird & Sons PA-23 Apache N2267P at Bangkok Don Muang on 10 July 1965 (UTD/Kirkpatrick/B19, color slide no. 1KP-19-SC5664)

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162 Trest, *Air Commando One*, p.119.
163 See the FAA US Civil Aircraft Register of 1 July 1966, p. 1075, for PV-2 N7455C, and p.153, for Do-28 N1153Q.
164 Acquired from Robert “Dutch” Brongersma in early 1961 (Conboy, *War in Laos*, p.7). Reports say that this was possibly AT-11 N4830N msn 3896, acquired in 1961 and said to have become XW-PAG.
165 The Camair 480 was a Ryan Twin Navion converted by Cameron Aircraft Co., and the aircraft reportedly acquired by Bird & Sons in 1961 was Camair 480 N229 msn I-066, written off at 175848N in Laos on 12 July 62; the pilot, a White Star passenger and a Thai interpreter on board are missing.
166 These 10 Porters were: N4226G msn 526, ex HB-FAK, which crashed in 1962 (LaDue, *April Fools Day - Kong Le style*, in: [http://air-america.org/Articles/LaDue3.htm](http://air-america.org/Articles/LaDue3.htm)); N4227G msn 532, which crashed at Vientiane (L-08) on 10 January 63 and burned; the pilot, Bill Gould, was badly burned (Log book of A. Rich, in: UTD/Rich/B1); the aircraft was no longer registered in 1966 (see the FAA US Civil Aircraft Register of 1 July 1966, p.597); XW-PBI msn 553 ex HB-FBG, which crashed near Pa Doung (LS-05), Laos, on 24 August 63 (There were no injuries; see the log book of A. Rich, in: UTD/Rich/B1); XW-PBL msn 556 ex HB-FBL; XW-PBQ msn 554 ex HB-FBH, which crashed at Ching Kong (T-516) on 26 June 64 (Don Orinbaum suffered minor injuries; aircraft XW-PBQ was a total write-off; see the log book of A. Rich, in: UTD/Rich/B1) and later N152L with Air America; XW-PCB msn 567 ex HB-FBO; XW-PCC msn 568 ex HB-FBT, which crashed in the Chiang Kong (T-516) area, Thailand, on 22 February 65, but was repaired (For details of this accident, see the log book of A. Rich, in: UTD/Rich/B1) and later N152L with Air America; XW-PCE msn 571 ex HB-FBX; to CASI; XW-PCH msn 576 ex HB-FBY; and possibly XW-PCI msn 523 ex HB-FBA). In July 65, four of their Porters crashed in quick succession (Conboy / Morrison, *Shadow war*, p.130). For the identities of these aircraft, see Burnett / Davis / Slack, *South-East Asia Civil Aircraft Registers*, pp.231/2, and Markus Herzig’s *The Pilatus Porter World*, in: [http://www.pc-6.com/porterprod1.htm](http://www.pc-6.com/porterprod1.htm).
Baron N1349Z (msn TC-172), Piper Apache N2267P (msn 23-877), five or six Dornier Do-28s acquired between 1961 and 1964, two Lockheed PV-2 Harpoons acquired in 1961, and perhaps Beech H18 N906T (msn BA-667).

167 Beech Baron N1349Z (msn TC-172) had been bought by Bird & Sons Inc on 11 August 61; CofR issued on 1 September 61; damage to left wing repaired by Bird & Sons (Vientiane) October 63. A letter dated 22 September 64, written to the Managing Director by Dave Hickler (in: UTD/Hickler/B7F7A), confirms that at that time, Bird & Sons had only one Baron. After the crash of PV-2 N7456C in September 61, this Baron was Bird & Sons’ only aircraft in Laos. Robert Hamblin flew it out of Vientiane, flying around Bill Lair and other CIA officers, and it was even used to transport 2-6 refugees per trip from Nam Tha to Ban Houei Sai in 1962 (Robert Hamblin, Letter dated 10 March 91 sent to prof. Bill Leary, in: UTD/Leary/B45F11).

168 CASI Apache N2267P was at Vientiane on 11 December 65 (List of aircraft seen by Dr. Jonathan Pote in Laos, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 8 August 2008 by Dr. Pote).

169 These 6-7 Do-28s were: N4223G msn 3013, which probably became XW-TBJ in 1962/3; (“TBJ”) crashed at Long Tieng on 2 March 64, but there were no injuries (log book of Allen Rich, in: UTD/Rich/B1); Do-28 XW-TBJ was repaired and seen again at Vientiane on 8 October 65, at Savannakhet on 14 December 65, and again at Vientiane in late December 65 following a crash (List of aircraft seen by Dr. Jonathan Pote in Laos, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 8 August 2008 by Dr. Pote); XW-TBJ was later reported as “crated by 1969” (Burnett/Slack/Davis, South-East Asia Civil Aircraft Registers, p.235); N4224G msn 3021, probably leased from Foreign Air Transport Development, Washington, in 1961 – a photo taken at Moung Phun in the fall of 1961 can be seen in: Conboy, War in Laos, p.14 – and transferred to Air America in January 62; N4222G msn 3026, which became XW-PCG with Boun Oum Airways in 1965. A photo taken at Thakhet, Laos (L-40), on 15 November 65 is in Love, Wings of Air America, p. 75. Formerly, when still with Bird & Sons, it carried the Erawan on its red cheatline, like most Bird aircraft. On 20 May 63, Bird’s N4222G lost one engine and landed Nong Kha road, but there were no injuries, and the aircraft was repaired; at least between 12 July 64 and 28 July 64, it was leased to Air America (log book of Allen Rich, in: UTD/Rich/B1); a slide in the collection of John Wiren (in: UTD/Wiren/B2) shows the aircraft as “4222G”; N4228G msn 3046, which crashed at Chong Ha (LS-48), Laos, on 4 April 64, but was repaired (see the log book of A. Rich, in: UTD/Rich/B1); N1153Q msn 3062, which crashed on final approach to Sam Thong (LS-20) on 19 February 65 (see the log book of A. Rich, in: UTD/Rich/B1); and probably XW-PBU msn 3029. This Do-28 was owned by Foreign Air Transport Development Inc, Washington, and had been leased to Air America as N4225G between June 62 and 13 May 64, when it was returned to FATDI (see: Aircraft status of 7 July 64 in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1) and reregistered as XW-PBU; as it was not operated by Air America in July 64, it was probably leased to Bird & Sons; a sixth Do-28, N9181X msn 3084, was delivered on 3 August 65 (Letter dated 28 April 1995, written to the author by Daimler-Benz Aerospace, successor to Dornier Aircraft), that is just prior to the take-over by Continental.

170 Lockheed PV-2s N7455C, msn 15-1597 ex BuA 37631, and N7456C, msn 15-1595 ex BuA 37629. N7455C was licensed in the “experimental-other uses” category (Marson, The Lockheed Twins, p.538) and was probably the aircraft in which special cameras had been installed by the Lockheed “Skunk Works” for photo-reconnaissance work in Laos (Hamilton-Merritt, Tragic mountains, p.99). Although it was cancelled from the US register only on 3 September 70, it was shot down east of Ban Houei Sai on 5 January 63; the four-man crew was able to jump from the burning aircraft on its way to impacting in high elephant grass. One kicker died, the other three crew members were rescued (LaDue, April Fools Day - Kong Le style, in: http://air-america.org/Articles/LaDue3.htm). N7456C was delivered to Laos on 27 January 61 and crashed at Phou Fa (LS-16), Laos, in September 61 (Ahern, Undercover armies, p.98). Like its sister ship, N7456C, whose photo, taken at Manila during delivery on 27 January 61, can be seen in Conboy, War in Laos, p.13, remained on the US Civil Aircraft Register with Bird & Sons until 3 September 70 (Marson, The Lockheed Twins, p.538).

171 This was registered to Continental Air Services, Reno on the FAA US Civil Aircraft Register of 1 July 1966. As it was built in 1964, it may have already been used by Bird & Sons prior to the take-over.
Letter of 28 May 65 sent by Bird & Sons to Dornier Aircraft discussing the loss of N1153Q
(Sent to the author on 28 April 1995 by Daimler-Benz Aerospace, the successor to Dornier)

But Bird & Sons also operated about fifteen bigger aircraft over the years, the most unusual of which were four Scottish Aviation Twin Pioneers acquired from Philippine Air Lines in 1963.172 Probably also in the early sixties, at least three Douglas C-47s were bought (N560 msn 10160; N7780C msn 25736; and N7781C msn 26763)173, of which N7780C flew as XW-PAP.174 But the backbone of Bird & Sons’ operations were seven Curtiss C-46s, five

172 Twin Pioneer XW-PBN (msn 565) was lost on 7 April 64, returning from the Houei Sai area, due to a lack of fuel, and crashed; the wreck was found on 8 April in the Mekong river, demolished; the pilot, Don Orinbaum, was injured, but alive (See the log book of A. Rich, in: UTD/Rich/B1). The next Twin Pioneer to disappear was XW-PBO (msn 566), which was damaged beyond repair at Muang Hein, near Saigon, South Vietnam, on 20 September 64. Twin Pioneer XW-PBJ (msn 564) was hit in check point saddle area on 5 November 63; there were, however, no injuries (log book of Allen Rich, in: UTD/Rich/B1), and the aircraft was repaired; on 30 April 64, “Bravo J. [was] hit by Flak over VS-71”, that is Phou Nong (log book of Allen Rich, in: UTD/Rich/B1). The last two Twin Pioneers, XW-PBJ and XW-PBB (msn 567), survived and were operated by Continental Air Services for some time, until both of them were damaged beyond repair in a heavy thunderstorm at Vientiane on 24 March 68 (see XOXO of 25 March 68, in: UTD/Hickler/B26F16). Later, one of them apparently became a restaurant at Vientiane (see Love, Wings of Air America, p.73). For the identities of these aircraft see Burnett / Davis / Slack, South-East Asia Civil Aircraft Registers, pp.231/2.


174 The letter of 22 September 64 by Dave Hickler states that “they have two flying C-47s” (in: UTD/Hickler/B7F7A). On 8 December 65, XW-PAP was seen at Pakse, on 20 March 66 at Thakhek West, said to be ex N7780C (List of aircraft seen by Dr. Jonathan Pote in Laos, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 8 August 2008 by Dr. Pote), which makes it msn 25736. In June 68, C-47 XW-PAP was based at Udorn with Continental Air Services (see Memorandum “Competitive aircraft” dated 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2). But it was probably registered as early as 1962.
of which were owned. The first C-46 (N4877V msn 22442) was bought on 3 November 61, but it crashed into a mountain near Phu Fa in Central Laos on 31 August 62, while making a low-level drop to PARU Capt. Dachar at LS-16 strip.175 In 1963, three more C-46Fs were bought, that is N4871V (msn 22410), N9473Z (msn 22293), and N9760Z (msn 22574), followed by N67961 (msn 22512) in April 64.176 One of them, probably N4871V, was already dismantled for parts in late 1964.177 Two more C-46s, XW-EAA and XW-EAB (msn 22232 and 33451), which had been bought by USAID-Laos from Air America on 8 March 63, were mostly operated by Bird & Sons, although occasionally, they were also used by Air America themselves. Air America also had a contract to maintain those 2 C-46s flown by Bird & Sons.178 In May 64, both aircraft were sold to the Royal Lao Government as XW-PBV (msn 22232) and XW-PBW (msn 33451), and for most of the time, both aircraft continued to be operated by Bird & Sons and later by Continental Air Services.179

Like Air America, Bird & Sons flew both CIA and USAID operations, i.e. overt and covert missions, before it was sold to Continental Air Lines to become Continental Air Services Inc. (CASI) on 1 September 1965.180 These activities included rice drop missions as well as reconnaissance flights – in February 61, Dutch Brongersma flew one of the PV-2s, probably N7455C, from Vientiane to the Plain of Jars to photograph a visit by “Red Prince” Souphanouvong and so to document his involvement with the North Vietnamese181 –, but also marking targets for Royal Lao Air Force T-28s with smoke grenades.182 Other activities

175 Pilots Campbell and Reno, PARU trooper Manop, and two indigenous “kicker” trainees were killed in the crash (LaDue, April Fools Day - Kong Le style, in: http://air-america.org/Articles/LaDue3.htm). A photo of Bird & Sons C-46 N4877V can be seen in Conboy, War in Laos, p. 14.
176 For the C-46s owned by Bird & Sons, see Davis / Martin / Whittle, The Curtiss C-46 Commando, pp.109, 117, and 119, and the Update, pp.16 and 17.
177 See the letter of 22 September 64 by Dave Hickler (in: UTD/Hickler/B7F7A). A photo of N4871C seen derelict at Vientiane in 1965 appears in Love, Wings of Air America, p. 78.
178 Letter dated 29 May 63, sent by Dave Hickler to the President of Air America, in: UTD/Leary/B32F2. The same letter also notes that 26 May 63 was a “Black Sunday” for Bird & Sons, because that very same day 5 of their aircraft had problems: 1) C-46 N9473Z needed an engine change at Luang Prabang, after a cylinder head had blown thru the cowling, 2) the engine of an unknown Porter quit over Vientiane because the aircraft had to make a dead stick landing, 3) C-46 XW-EAA needed a cylinder change at Luang Prabang, 4) XW-EAB needed a tire change at Paksane, and 5) Porter N4222G had an in-flight engine failure in Thailand and had to land on a road near Nong Khai (SS-22); this aircraft had already lost the engine on 25 May and was to lose it again on 28 May 63.
179 See the Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee of Air Asia Co Ltd of 9 April 63 in: UTD/CIA/B7F2; the Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee of Air America Inc. of 11 June 63 in: UTD/CIA/B3F4; Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to September 1963 in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1; Burnett / Davis / Slack, South-East Asia Civil Aircraft Registers, p.231. XW-EAB carried the Erawan; photos can be found in the Eckholdt-video, taken in 1964 over Ritaville Ridge near Vientiane (at 1.01.10 + 1.15.18 hours); since 1969, both aircraft, XW-PBV and XW-PBW, were used again by Air America, and now they appeared as “grant aircraft” in the Flight Operations Circulars (e.g. the one of 1 July 71, in; UTD/Hickler/B8F7B), because they were owned by the Royal Laotian Government (see the Memorandum “Schedule of Aircraft (Insurances)” dated 19 July 71, in: UTD/Herd/B2).
180 Castle, At war, p.59; Flight, no. 3135, vol. 95, 10 April 1969, p.569.
181 Hamilton-Merritt, Tragic mountains, pp.99-100.
182 A report dated 11 September 1964 (in: UTD/Hickler/B8F8) notes that on 8 and 9 September 64, Bird & Sons’ Porter XW-PBL (msn 556), after returning to Long Tieng (LS-20A) from a rice drop mission in the Ta Vieng (LS-13) area, was loaded with smoke grenades at Long Tieng, met with a flight of RLAF T-28s over Ta Vieng and marked targets for them from an altitude of approximately 4,000 feet, whereupon the T-28s expended on the targets with excellent results.
Bird & Sons C-46s N9473Z and N4871V (derelict) at Vientiane in 1965/6, taken by Jon Pote
(both photo published here with kind permission from Dr. Jonathan Pote)
The photo on the far right was taken in July 63 by David Hickler
(photo no.1-DH54-6-PB85 at UTD/Hickler)

Two photos of USAID-Laos C-46 XW-EAB operated by Bird & Sons
(left: photo no. 1-DH54-6-PB70 in UTD/Hickler, taken by David Hickler)
(right: photo ex no. 1-WL1-28-26-PB412, taken by Ed Eckholdt, preserved at UTD/Leary/B77F2)

included reconnaissance and photo missions. This type of missions may explain why many
Bird aircraft, in addition to their red cheatline, also carried the Erawan, i.e. the insignia of the
Royal Lao Air Force, although Air America’s aircraft were mostly all silver – except for
the Porters and the Beech 18s. Around July 1965, Communist insurgency activities led the
CIA’s Bangkok Station to increase its programs of public safety and support to the hill tribes,
and so, 2 Bird & Sons Porters were assigned to Chiang Mai for air support to these
programs. There is no doubt: Bird & Sons and Air America were actually competitors, and
this may also become evident by the fact that, when USAID-Laos requested services to be
operated by a Wren 460 in 1964, the Executive Committees of Air Asia and Air America
approved the purchase of one Wren 460 on 15 September 64. But this approval was
contingent upon USAID’s acceptance of the Air America’s Wren bid. As has been shown

183 Known examples are: C-46s N4871V (photo in: Love, Wings of Air America, p.78) and N9760Z (photo in: UTD/Hickler/B33), and Do-28 N4222G (slide in: UTD/Wiren/B2).
184 Some of Air America’s Helios bore the Laotian flag in addition to their civilian (XW-) registrations: Known examples are: XW-PBX (photo in: UTD/HicklerB29), XW-PCD (photo in: UTD/Rich/B2F6), and XW-PCS (in: UTD/Bays/B1, slide 35); only the two C-46s leased to Air America by the Royal Laotian Government bore the Laotian flag plus the Erawan (photo of XW-PBW in: UTD/Anthony/F9).
above, Bird & Sons, the competitor, did buy two Wren 460s in 1964, whereas Air America did never buy any Wren 460, as USAID accepted a new PC-6 on its Bangkok contract. On the other hand, when Air America sold their C-46s B-914 and B-918 to USAID-Laos on 8 March 63, they hoped to also operate them in the future, but, as has been seen above, it was primarily their competitor Bird & Sons who operated them as XW-EAA and XW-EAB. In spite of this competitive situation, Bird & Sons and Air America cooperated quite well in everyday business: C-46 XW-EAB was not the only case, when aircraft of Bird & Sons were actually operated by Air America. For example, on 8 September 64, Bird’s C-46s N9473Z and N9760Z were flown by Bird crews, but used on an Air America drop mission out of Vientiane. Another example was Bird’s Do-28 N4222G, which was operated by Air America at least between 12 July 64 and 28 July 64. Some pilots also had close connections with both companies: Robert L. (“Dutch”) Brongersma had been a pilot with CAT in the fifties, before he became manager of Bird & Sons. Allen W. Rich, who also flew for Bird & Sons in 1964, always notes all accidents he knows about in his log book – accidents of Air America as well as of Bird & Sons aircraft. Finally, Air America and Bird & Sons worked together in creating Boun Oum Airways, which will be described in the

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186 Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee of Air Asia Co Ltd and Air America Inc. of 15 September 64 and of 12 November 64 (both in: UTD/CIA/B7F3).
187 The Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee of Air Asia Co Ltd of 22 January 63 (in: UTD/CIA/B7F2) state (p.2): “USAID has expressed interest in purchasing or leasing two C-46 aircraft from the Company for use in Laos, USAID may also wish to have the Company maintain and operate the two aircraft. The Executive Committee [...] agreed that the Company should endeavor to assist USAID in the matter.” They actually helped their competitor!
188 Vientiane daily flight schedule of 8 September 64, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F8.
190 Leary, Perilous missions, pp.122, 129/30, 192, and 217; Robbins, Air America, pp.68 and 116.
following chapter. A letter written on 22 September 1964 by David Hickler, Air America’s General Manager of Laos at that time, to Air America’s Managing Director George Doole about a party organized by Bill Bird of Bird & Sons, gives a good picture of the climate existing between the two companies: On the one hand, Air America’s Dave Hickler had been invited by Bill Bird to a party whose guests of honor were two high ranking US bankers; on the other hand, towards the bankers, Dave Hickler presents Air America’s economical situation by the words: “we are doing fine”, while in his report to George Doole, he describes the situation by the words: “Everything is going on about normal down here; that means a continual crisis of one form or another”, adding that he wondered “what is in the wind for this area. Maybe nothing, but I would think this visit bears notice”\textsuperscript{192} – a mixture of friendliness towards a partner and distrust towards a competitor. Nevertheless, the cooperation was good enough to commonly support a new Laotian company: Boun Oum Airways.

\textsuperscript{192} Letter of 22 September 64 by David Hickler to Air America’s Managing Director, in: UTD/Hickler/B7F7A.
8) A child of two mothers: Boun Oum Airways (BOA):

Since 1963, the CIA had been operating project *Hardnose*, sending in reconnaissance teams for trail-watching along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. But as many Air America and Bird & Sons missions flown into the Laotian panhandle were considered to be very sensitive, resupply drops for *Auto Défense de Choc* (ADC) units and for road watcher teams in the south had to go to Nakhon Phanom in Thailand instead, coming in thru Thakhek or Savannakhet. Then, in the spring of 1964, two CIA case officers, Walt Floyd and a former Montana smoke jumper called “Bill”, were allowed to open shop at Savannakhet, where they were soon joined by Team W. However, at that time, a more overt US paramilitary presence at Savannakhet was still forbidden. This was the reason, why in mid-1964, the CIA created a new air transport company with Asian crews, who – in the case an aircraft went down – would be more plausibly deniable than the Caucasian crews of Air America and Bird & Sons. And so, Boun Oum Airways (BOA) came into existence.

The company was founded in the spring of 1964 and was headed by Prince Boun Oum, who, together with the rightist General Phoumi Nosavan, had led the US-backed Revolutionary Committee and a pro-Western army at Savannakhet in 1960, who then, the same year, had headed the American-sponsored counter-government in the South, which had been supplied by Air America thru the US Embassy, and who, on 4 January 1961, had become the head of the official Government of Laos. But it had been only in June 62, after the battles of Nam Tha and Houei Sai that Prince Boun Oum had capitulated and agreed on a coalition with Souvanna Phouma. While this new Laotian coalition government had been led by Souvanna Phouma, Souphanouvong, and Phoumi Nosavan, Prince Boun Oum had been reappointed for life as Inspector General of the Kingdom and then had retired to his home in Champassak.

Help for the new airline came from 2 sides: Air America provided maintenance and the use of a single Helio Courier, while Bird & Sons “lent” a Dornier Do-28 and financial management to the new airline. Among the first Thai pilots who were to fly for Boun Oum Airways was Capt. Boonrat Comintra, a former Royal Thai Air Force helicopter pilot who had flown T-6s for the Royal Lao Air Force in 1961/2 and who, now, was checked out in both aircraft by personnel from each of Bird & Sons and Air America in the summer of 1964. Along with other Thai crews, Boonrat Comintra flew out of Nakhon Phanom, Thailand under the provisions of Boun Oum’s first contract, resupplying road-watcher teams working on the slopes close to Mu Gia Pass. At night, Boun Oum’s Helio would drop the supplies to an isolated clearing (“The Drop Zone”) located some 34 kilometers northwest of Mu Gia and then to “Yankee Pad”, a new drop site closer to Mu Gia.

On 10 November 64, Air America leased their Bell 47G-2 B-803 to Boun Oum Airways, whereupon the aircraft probably received an XW-registration, and as in his letter accompanying Lease Agreement no. 64-153, E.C. Kirkpatrick, Air America’s Director of Flying Contracts, stated that “we have established a plan whereby the Certificate of Registration, Certificate of Airworthiness and Aircraft Radio License will be removed from the aircraft immediately upon execution of the attached document which will effectively deregister the aircraft, permitting you to seek registration and certification of the aircraft in your own right.” The Bell 47 was also
included in the maintenance contract that Boun Oum had with Air America. However, after Boun Oum’s new helicopter had flown from Nakhon Phanom to Yankee Pad on 21 November 64 in order to pick up a malaria casualty, the helicopter collapsed onto the pad after take-off due to a failure of power. The Bell 47 was repaired at a cost of $9,000, which were reimbursed by Boun Oum, but it is unknown if it was ever used again.

The aircraft of Boun Oum Airways were utilized exclusively in support of United States Government contracts, were maintained by Air America, and Air America also organized the flight training for Boun Oum Airways. From 5 May to 17 May 64, Air America pilot Allen W. Rich was employed as a flight instructor for Boun Oum pilots, using Air America’s Helio Couriers B-839 (msn 504) and B-871 (msn 530) out of Udorn. On 13 May 64, B-871 returned to its lessor Skyways Cargo Inc, and so on 14 May 64, the aircraft was repainted as “530” – but flight training continued until 17 May 64. Then, on 18 May 64, Helio “530” was sold to Eurotransport Anstalt, Vaduz, Liechtenstein, for Bird & Sons, reregistered as XW-PBS, and leased to Boun Oum Airways the same day, and until 21 June 64, Allen Rich continued to fly Helio XW-PBS for Boun Oum Airways. In July 64, Allen Rich flew another Boun Oum Helio, XW-PBT (msn 566). A third Helio, XW-PEA (msn 541), which had been acquired by Eurotransport Anstalt, Vaduz / Continental Air Services in March 66, was possibly also leased to Boun Oum Airways.

Two Boun Oum Helios at Thakhek West: XW-PBS (in Nov.65) and XW-PBT (in early 1966) (with kind permission from the photographer: Dr. Jonathan Pote)

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198 Letter no. DFC-64-242 of 10 Nov. 64 by E. C. Kirkpatrick to Prince Boun Oum, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F8.
199 Conboy / Morrison, Shadow war, p.121.
200 Letter of 10 November 64 by E. C. Kirkpatrick to Prince Boun Oum, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F8, and Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committees of Air Asia Co Ltd and Air America Inc of 1 December 64 (in: UTD/CIA/B7F3) and of 5 January 65 (in: UTD/CIA/B7F4).
201 CIA’s Vientiane Station had requested Air America Capt. Jim Rhyne as Instructor pilot (Leary/Manuscript, ch. VI, p. 491, in: UTD/Leary/B19F4).
202 Aircraft status as of 7 July 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1.
203 See the Log book of Allen W. Rich in: UTD/Rich/B1, where it appears as “B-530”.
206 Reportedly, Bird & Sons also had another subsidiary created by the CIA, Von Gage Airlines, but nothing is known about this outfit (Leary/Manuscript, ch. V, p. 535, in: UTD/Leary/B19F4).
Helio XW-PEA at Thakhek West in 23 July 66, probably also operated by Boun Oum (with kind permission from the photographer: Dr. Jonathan Pote)

The identity of Boun Oum Airways’ first Dornier Do-28 can also be established: On 22 September 64, Bird & Sons were “operating four Do-28 aircraft plus one down for maintenance/parts/repairs.” It is unknown which of these 5 Do-28s was not operational in September 64, but Bird & Sons were certainly operating N4222G, N4228G, and N1153Q in September 64, possibly also Do-28 XW-TBJ (believed to be msn 3013 ex N4223G), and the fifth was former Air America Do-28 N4225G (msn 3029) that had been returned to Foreign Air Transport Development (FATD) of Washington DC/Thailand and reregistered XW-PBU in May 64. Such a new XW-registry only makes sense if we assume that XW-PBU was to be used by Boun Oum Airways (BOA), because BOA and the CIA wanted to underline that this was not another American company. Indeed, Boun Oum’s first Do-28 was XW-PBU.

After Bird & Sons had been purchased by Continental Airlines in September 65 to become Continental Air Services Inc (CASI), Boun Oum Airways expanded using aircraft on loan from Continental Air Services and soon came under CASI’s control and management. The airline prospered and added additional airframes (on loan from CASI), including two Piper PA-18 Super Cubs, a Beech Tradewind, an additional Do-28, and two C-47s. The Super Cubs were apparently used in the panhandle, overflying the trail during daylight hours in order to intercept and record PAVN radio transmissions. Their identities can probably be found in the list of aircraft operated by CASI in May 71, where they appear as XW-PEM msn 18-8435 ex N4215Z and XW-PEN msn 18-4470 ex N62417. As these XW-registrations

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208 Letter dated 22 Sept. 64 sent by Dave Hickler to Air America’s Managing Director, in: UTD/Hickler/B7F7A.
209 See the Do-28 file of my The Aircraft of Air America.
210 Indeed, according to Leary (Manuscript, ch. VI, p. 491, in: UTD/Leary/B19F4), Boun Oum’s first Do-28 was the former FATD aircraft, XW-PBU.
212 Conboy / Morrison, Shadow war, p.146.
213 Conboy / Morrison, Shadow war, p.149 note 19.
214 The list “CASI, planes owned and operated in Laos, Thailand and Cambodia area as of 3 May 71” (in: UTD/Bison/B5, microfilm reel no. 29) gives XW-PEM as msn 18-8455 ex N4215Z, which cannot be correct (e-
were issued only around June 1969, and as their US registrations are no longer listed on the
official FAA Civil Aircraft Register of 1 July 1966, they apparently used other identities,
when flying with Boun Oum. Their “Beech Tradewind” probably was Beech H18 N906T
(msn BA-667), the only one that CASI had at that time, perhaps using an unknown XW-
identity to make it look more Laotian.

It was probably in September 65 or a little bit later that Air America received Do-28 XW-
PBU on lease from Foreign Air Transport Development Inc, before it became B-931 with Air
America in December 65. As CASI’s new Do-28Bs had not yet arrived at that time, 
Boun Oum’s replacement aircraft could only have been Do-28 N4222G (msn 3026), which
became XW-PCG in mid-1965. As XW-PCG was painted in a unique color scheme
displaying a large dragon on the side, while it had previously flown in basic Bird & Sons
colors with a red line and the Erawan on the side (see the photo below), this dragon seems to

Bird & Sons Do-28A 4222G leased to Air America, seen here over Laos in July 64
(UTD/Wiren/B2)

mail dated 27 January 2011, kindly sent by the author by Steve Darke). The US Civil Aircraft Register of 1
CASI, planes owned and operated in Laos, Thailand and Cambodia area as of 3 May 71, in: UTD/Bison/B5,
microfilm reel no. 29. CASI pilot Sarisporn Bhibalkul logged PA-18 XW-PEM between November 70 and
February 72 and PA-18 XW-PEN between November 70 and March 72 (e-mail dated 15 January 2011, kindly
sent to the author by Steve Darke).

The Memorandum “Competitive aircraft” of 18 June 68 (in: UTD/Herd/B2) lists 2 Piper Cubs with CASI,
N711 and N712. Both are said to be Customer owned and used for training at Udorn and Vientiane in June 1968
together with Cessna 180 N713. However, none of these 3 aircraft appears in the FAA’s official US Civil
Aircraft Registers of 1 January 68 and 1 July 69. These may have been the aircraft used by the CIA-built flight
training school to train Hmong pilots at Nong Khai since 1966 (Conboy / Morrison, Shadow war, p.170). CASI
pilot Sarisporn Bhibalkul logged PA-18s “711” and “712” between September 68 and June 69 (e-mail dated 15
January 2011, kindly sent to the author by Steve Darke).

See the Do-28 file of The Aircraft of Air America.

According to the letter of 28 April 1995 written to the author by Daimler-Benz Aerospace, CASI’s Do-28Bs
were delivered only at the end of 1965 and in 1966.

Do-28 XW-PCG was seen at Pakse on 8 September 65 and at Thakhek West on 15 November 65 by Jon
Pote, who also checked its identity; the aircraft was Do-28A-1 msn 3026, formerly N4222G (List of aircraft
seen by Dr. Jonathan Pote in Laos, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 8 August 2008 by Dr. Pote).
have been the logo of Boun Oum Airways – although most of their aircraft probably did not use it. In September 65, Air America returned their Do-28 N4224G (msn 3021) to Foreign

Boun Oum Airways Do-28 XW-PCG at Thakhek West on 15 Nov. 65, taken by Jon Pote (with kind permission from Dr. Jonathan Pote)

Air Transport Development Inc, and it immediately became XW-PCJ.220 There is no doubt that it flew with Boun Oum Airways since that time, as it was still current with BOA in June 1968;221 in May 71, XW-PCJ was stored at Vientiane.222 Apparently, Boun Oum Airways operated some more Do-28s, after CASI had taken over Bird & Sons in September 65. One of them seems to have been XW-TBJ (probably msn 3013), which had a dark stripe on the side of the fuselage similar to that on XW-PCG. This aircraft was seen several times in the second half of 1965 – the last time at Vientiane in late December 65 following an accident.223

Do-28 XW-TBJ somewhere in Laos in 1964/65, probably operated by Boun Oum Airways (color slide taken by John Wiren, in: UTD/Wiren/B2)

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220 For the identity of this aircraft see the Do-28 file of The Aircraft of Air America.
221 List of competitive aircraft distributed by Air America on 1 June 1968, in: In: UTD/Herd/B2.
222 CASI, planes owned and operated in Laos, Thailand and Cambodia area as of 3 May 71, in: UTD/Bison/B5, microfilm reel no. 29.
223 Do-28 XW-TBJ was seen at Vientiane on 8 October 65, at Savannakhet on 14 December 65, and again at Vientiane in late December 65 following a crash (List of aircraft seen by Dr. Jonathan Pote in Laos, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 8 August 2008 by Dr. Pote).
The next Do-28 for BOA seems to have been XW-PCT (msn 3058). This aircraft had been delivered to CASI as N9184X on 29 December 65\textsuperscript{224} and was reregistered as XW-PCT in the spring of 1966,\textsuperscript{225} apparently in order to be flown by Boun Oum; by June 68, it had returned to CASI and was leased to Air Vietnam – still flying as XW-PCT.\textsuperscript{226} Finally, Do-28 XW-PDB (msn 3046): This aircraft had been delivered to Bird & Sons as N4228G in the early sixties and was reregistered as XW-PDB in the first half of 1966.\textsuperscript{227} The Laotian registry makes again believe that this was another one of Boun Oum Airways’ Dorniers.

CASI Do-28s N9184X and N9185X cocooned in early 66 (in: UTD/Wharton/B1F6)

Do-28 XW-PDB at Thakhek West on 22 July 66, probably operated by Boun Oum Airways (with kind permission from the photographer: Dr. Jonathan Pote)

\textsuperscript{224} Letter dated 28 April 1995 written to the author by Daimler-Benz Aerospace.

\textsuperscript{225} “N9184X Do-28B-1 VTE 23 Jan 66 c/n 3058. Seen again PSE 2 May 66, silver overall, then registered as XW-PCT. […] N9180X-N9186X were all red and cream” (List of aircraft seen by Dr. Jonathan Pote in Laos, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 8 August 2008 by Dr. Pote). CASI pilot Sarisporn Bhibalkul logged Do-28 XW-PCT between March and October 66 (e-mail dated 15 January 2011, kindly sent to the author by Steve Darke).

\textsuperscript{226} List of competitive aircraft distributed by Air America on 1 June 1968, in: In: UTD/Herd/B2.

\textsuperscript{227} In January 1966, Do-28A-1 N4228G was seen all silver at Vientiane on overhaul. Later it was damaged, but was seen again a Thakhek West on 22 July 66 and later, but now reregistered as XW-PDB (List of aircraft seen by Dr. Jonathan Pote in Laos, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 8 August 2008 by Dr. Pote).
It is more difficult at the moment to identify Boun Oum Airways’ 2 C-47s: They were said to have been loaned from Continental Air Services, and the first of them crashed in December 1965 shortly after taking off from Vientiane’s Wattay Airport, killing all on board, while the second C-47 disappeared on 17 April 1966, while dropping ammunition northeast of Ban Song (LS-29), that is in the northeastern part of Laos.\(^{228}\) This C-47 had probably been shot down by ground fire, but neither the plane nor the Thai crew were found during the one-month search that followed.\(^{229}\) Comparing CASI’s known fleet of C-47s with known losses of CASI C-47s, there are several “open ends”, that is C-47s whose fate is unknown: One of them is CASI C-47 N7781C (msn 26763) – one of the aircraft that CASI had inherited from Bird & Sons. Although officially still registered to CASI on the FAA’s US Civil Aircraft Register at least between 1 July 66 and 1 July 69, it was last heard of in 1965,\(^{230}\) and does no longer exist in June 68.\(^{231}\) This was probably the Boun Oum C-47 that was destroyed in December 65, perhaps while flying under an unknown Laotian registration. Two other CASI C-47s whose fates are unknown, are N79971 (msn 13184), acquired in 1965, but still current in August 1966,\(^{232}\) and N719A (msn 4309), acquired in 1966. Although both aircraft are listed on the US Civil Aircraft Register between at least 1 July 66 and 1 July 69, they were no longer with CASI in June 68.\(^{233}\) But they are believed to have been registered as XW-PDF and XW-PDH (or vice-versa) in 1966, and so were lost only in March and May 68 respectively.\(^{234}\) The Boun Oum Airways C-47 that disappeared on 17 April 66 was apparently N8744R (msn 20156), which had been acquired in late 65, but which was reported to have crashed at Sam Neua on 17 April 1966, that is in the northeastern part of Laos,\(^{235}\) apparently flying as XW-PCY\(^{236}\) as it remained on the FAA’s US Civil Aircraft Register at least between 1 July 66 and 1 July 69.

Despite of these losses, Boun Oum Airways continued operations. Soon CASI pilots were flying BOA designated aircraft on missions. One of them was for Project Hark. Since 1963, Project Hardnose had continually experienced language problems with the road watcher teams involved and so was continually challenged to find English-fluent road watchers. As a consequence, Project Hark was introduced in early 1967, the logical successor to Hardnose. The Hark-I was a modified USAF survival radio. The road watcher would press one button for each truck he spotted, another button for each soldier, different buttons for time and location and one last button that would burst transmit the information to aircraft overflying the area of operations.\(^{237}\) These aircraft were a new chance for Boun Oum Airways: In 1967, Boun Oum Airways, through CASI, bid on the Hark relay flight contract with the CIA beating Air America who had proposed flying the missions in either Volpars or Beech C-45s.

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229 Conboy / Morrison, Shadow war, pp. 149, note 20.
236 C-47 XW-PCY was reported to have been lost in Laos (coordinates AA 660000) on 16 April 1966, while flying on a mission for AIRA, the US Air Attaché Laos (“Aircraft All Loss by Tail number”, page 71, no date, Folder 14, Box 10, Garnett Bell Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, details kindly sent to the author by Sid Nanson on 2 June 2011).
237 Conboy / Morrison, Shadow war, pp.142-46.
Soon BOA Do-28s were flying night missions over the Ho Chi Minh trail to gather and relay the *Hark* transmissions. Within a week of beginning its execution of the *Hark* contract, that is on 12 March 67, a BOA Do-28 flown by a CASI pilot, Carl V. Stone lost control of its aircraft and crashed into a hanger at Savannakhet. Following the crash the CIA pulled the *Hark* contract from Boun Oum Airways and transferred it to Air America who would fly the Hark relay missions in modified Volpar Turbo 18s soon afterwards. But this was not the only accident that struck Boun Oum Airways in 1967: In the night of 28 May 67, a Thai-piloted BOA Do-28 took off from Savannakhet with a load of fresh meat for a team in the northern panhandle. Encountering a heavy rainstorm, the aircraft crashed into a karst 15 kilometers east of Mahaxay. The identities of these 2 ill-fated Do-28s are unknown, but taking into consideration which Bird & Sons / CASI Do-28s are known to have been destroyed before and which Bird & Sons / CASI Do-28s are known to have existed after those dates, there are only 2 candidates left: XW-PCG (msn 3026) and XW-PDB (msn 3046).

The aircraft of CASI and BOA, in: Memorandum “Competitive aircraft” of 18 June 68 (in: UTD/Herd/B2)

These 2 accidents were said to have been the end of Boun Oum Airways, and at least the 3 Helios went to Air America in 1967: XW-PBS, XW-PBT, and XW-PEA were all sold to the Pacific Corporation on 15 April 1967 and turned over to Air America on 16 April 67. But this was not the end of Boun Oum Airways: The Helios were apparently replaced by CASI Turbo Porters in 67 or even earlier, and in June 68, two CASI Porters were still leased to Boun Oum Airways: XW-PCL (msn 583) and XW-PDG (msn 517), which both probably returned to CASI in early 69. In 1968, Boun Oum had already transferred its base

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238 Conboy / Morrison, *Shadow war*, p.146.
from Vientiane to Udorn.\textsuperscript{242} As to the Dornier Do-28s, in June 1968, only XW-PCJ (probably msn 3021, i.e. former Air America N4224G) remained with BOA.\textsuperscript{243} What eventually happened to Boun Oum Airways is unknown, but it may have been completely absorbed by Continental Air Services. Interestingly, Lee Gossett mentions that there were 4 CASI Porters based at Savannakhet that were always flown by Thai pilots.\textsuperscript{244} Perhaps this was what at the end remained of Boun Oum Airways.

\textsuperscript{242} Memorandum “Competitive aircraft” of 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2.
\textsuperscript{243} Memorandum “Competitive aircraft” of 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2.
\textsuperscript{244} E-mail dated 2 February 2013 kindly sent to the author by Lee Gossett.
9) The cooperation with Continental Air Services Inc. (CASI):

The origin of Continental Air Services, Inc. is described by Tom Ziemba of *Air America Collectors’ Network* as follows: “In 1964, Continental Airlines received one of the first Military Air Transport System (MATS) contracts to fly troops and cargo between the United States and Southeast Asia. Continental was able to add four Boeing 707-320s to its fleet just to service these lucrative contracts. It was one of many ‘traditional’ US carriers indirectly taking part in the Vietnam War. Later that year, in an effort to gain a larger share of the money to be made in the Laotian market, Continental threatened to approach the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) and complain that the government-owned Air America, Inc. was receiving government contracts without ‘real’ competition. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was concerned that Continental would bring to light its ownership of Air America, Inc. In response, Ray Cline, a CIA Deputy Director met Robert F. Six, then president of Continental Airlines for cocktails in the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Washington, DC. Cline had a unique proposition for Bob Six, asking him to start a small airline in Southeast. After a lunch at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia deal was struck. The CIA would agree to Continental receiving more U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) contracts if Continental would allow the CIA to use Continental as a back-up in Southeast Asia. In April, 1965 Continental Air Services, Inc. was incorporated as a Nevada corporation and wholly-owned subsidiary of Continental Airlines. Robert Rousselot, ex-Civil Air Transport (CAT) Vice-President of Operations, was its first president. The new airline was without aircraft, a small detail that was rectified in September of 1965 with the purchase of Bird & Son’s aviation division.”

In August 1965, Continental Air Lines paid $4 ½ million in cash to take over the aviation division of Bird & Sons, and on 1 September 1965, Continental Air Services Inc. (CASI) was formed, whose main base continued to be Vientiane in Laos. A more detailed report can be found in a small History of Continental Air Services Inc, dated 1 September 69.

Continental Air Services, Inc. is a wholly owned subsidiary of Continental Airlines, Inc. of Los Angeles, California, one of the eleven major trunk carriers in the United States. [...] Continental Air Services, Inc. a general aviation organization is engaged in commercial and contract air charter operations in Southeast Asia. In early 1965, Mr. R. F. Six, President of Continental Airlines, became interested in extending the efficient and successful operations of his airline to Southeast Asia. A small air charter organization known as Bird and Sons, was found to be available and was purchased outright by Continental. Active operations were begun on 1 September 1965. In the initial stages, the operation consisted of 22 aircraft that were based in Vientiane, Laos and under contract to U.S. AID/Laos. The fleet was made up of a variety of different type aircraft to meet particular needs at that time. An immediate program was launched to standardize the aircraft fleet, which now consists of nine types of aircraft and numbers 51 aircraft. During December 1965, an operation was initiated in Vietnam, which was designed to fill the needs of the many commercial contractors requiring airlift in that country. The operation was inaugurated with a mixed fleet of 4 aircraft and now consists of 19 aircraft consisting of 5 different types. The Bangkok operation at the present time consists of one aircraft operating under contract to

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245 At [http://www.air-america.net/casi-hist.htm](http://www.air-america.net/casi-hist.htm).

246 By the summer of 1965, Bird & Sons had lost 20 aircraft – 2 by ground fire and 18 due to pilot errors. In July 65, 4 of their Turbo-Porters had crashed in quick succession (Conboy / Morrison, *Shadow war*, p.130).

247 Robbins, *Air America*, p.68.

USOM Thailand. Continental Air Services, Inc. operates with three divisions, Laos/Udorn, Bangkok and Saigon. A description of each division follows:

**Laos/Udorn:** This division has its headquarters in Vientiane, Laos and is the largest of the divisions. The operating fleet of 31 aircraft is totally contracted to USAID/Laos. The main maintenance base is at Vientiane, with support stations maintained at Udorn, Pakse, Savannakhet, Luang Prabang and Long Tieng. Mr. R. L. Bernard is the General Manager of the Laos/Udorn division, also an Assistant Vice President of Continental Air Services. Mr. H. J. Sonn is Director of Maintenance for all three divisions and is based at Vientiane, Laos. This division operates totally under contract and in support of the USAID/Laos Mission. There are approximately 435 employees assigned to the division and the fleet of 31 aircraft produce about 5000 hours of revenue flying per month and work for all the different divisions of the USAID/Laos mission, such as Public Health, Public Works, Bureau of Public Roads, Agriculture, Education and Refugee Relief.

**Vietnam:** The Vietnam division has its main facility at Saigon and operates in support of various commercial contractors throughout Vietnam. There are approximately 200 persons assigned to this division and the fleet of 19 aircraft contribute about 2000 hours of revenue flying per month to the overall total.

**Bangkok:** The Bangkok division is the smallest of the three divisions and only operates one aircraft, but supplies an enormous amount of support for both of the other divisions. Bangkok being a focal point of the area works very closely with both the Laos/Udorn and Vietnam divisions. There are approximately 15 persons assigned to the Bangkok Station. In total, Continental Air Services, Inc. in Southeast Asia has a total of 51 aircraft and approximately 650 employees. The combined fleet averages 7000 hours of revenue flying per month and serves the needs of a variety of organizations, all of which are contributing to the overall U.S. Government effort in the Southeast Asia area.”

An update of 7 July 71 gives “a current listing of the Board of Directors and Officers of Continental Air Services, Inc.: Board of Directors: G. Edward Cotter, Alexander Damm, Thomas D. Finney Jr., Lloyd N. Hand, Dominic P. Renda, Robert F. Six, William D. Tetsch. Officers: Robert F. Six (Chairman of the Board), G. Edward Cotter (President), Alexander Damm (Vice-President), William N. Hahn (Vice-President), Robert L. Brongersma (Vice-President), Hayden H. Cady (Treasurer), Richard L. Bernard (Assistant Vice-President and General Manager, Laos/Udorn), Donald M. Rinker (Assistant Vice-President, Thailand and Station Manager, Bangkok), Raymond M. Stone (Assistant Secretary).”

After Continental Airlines had taken over Bird & Sons to form Continental Air Services Inc., Bill Bird, the former owner of Bird & Sons, did not completely retreat from aviation business, however: In August 68, he started to operate some helicopters out of Bangkok (1 Bell 206 Jet Ranger and 1 Bell 47-G3B1). Later, Bird created Lao Air Development of Vientiane, which, in May 72, operated 4 Bell 206s, 1 Bell 47, 1 Twin Bonanza, 1 Cessna 337, 1 Cessna 206, and 3 Cessna 150s. And in July 1974, Bird created Bird Air, which was to...

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251 The Company confidential dated 26 May 72 (in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C) gives the following fleet for Lao Air Development: Bell 206s “14G”, that is Bell 206A N4014G msn 187 (regd. to Bird & Sons in: FAA US Civil Aircraft Register of 1 July 69, vol. I, p.712). “376”, that is N6376 msn 729, reportedly later also flown as XW-
become a major cargo operator to fly supplies into Phnom Penh during the last days before communist take-over.252

Nevertheless, these future activities of Bill Bird were relatively small compared to those undertaken by the new Continental Air Services, as the take-over meant a considerable increase of the number of aircraft used: While the two Wrens and the Apache were sold in 1968, four Cessna 180s were acquired about the same year.253 From late 1966 onwards, CASI even operated a helicopter, i.e. a single Fairchild-Hiller FH-1100; but when it crashed in early 1968, CASI reverted to become a strictly fixed-wing operator.254 Of the original fleet of 9

PKC; sold as VH-SAI on 7 August 80, XW-PHO (msn 553, acquired in 71, crash landed 80 km from Vientiane on 4 January 72, reregistered as N57903 in July 74; sold as C-GAHI on 11 June 79), and XW-PHT (msn 593 ex 9V-BCY, written off in July 71; probably the LAD Jet Ranger that crashed and burned in the LS-272 area on 29 June 71, killing the pilot and 4 passengers – see Tom Matthews, Diary, p. 14, formerly in: UTD/Leary/Ser.I, B8F13); another Bell 206B reported to have been with Bird was N2959W msn 805, cancelled on 11 May 79 as sold as C-GAHP; Bell 47G-3B-1 N6252N msn 6666; Beech D50C Twin Bonanza N9316Y (msn DH-295; regd. to Bird & Sons in: FAA US Civil Aircraft Register of 1 July 69, vol. II, p.1713); Cessna 337A N6317F (msn 337-0317); Cessna U206 N4963F (msn U206-0663); and three Cessna 150Hs, acquired in August 70: XW-PGS (probably msn 67251 ex N6451S); it escaped to Thailand on 26 May 75 (e-mail dated 27 January 2011 kindly sent to the author by Steve Darke); XW-PGT (probably msn 67563 ex N6763S); and XW-PGU (probably msn 67894 ex N7194S; this aircraft was exported to Laos on 9 April 71 and escaped to Bangkok in 1971. It was taken on charge by the Royal Thai Air Force as Phi-1-191 in 1971 and operated since by the flying training school at Don Muang, where it was seen unmarked in November 89, using call sign “Sunny Bravo” and flying with the military flying school. Most recently it was coded “60401” with 604 Squadron; in 2005 it was registered as HS-AFA and was seen disused in January 2010: E-mail dated 15 January 2011, kindly sent to the author by Steve Darke).

252 In July 74, William H. Bird formed Bird Air, which, on 11 July 74, signed a contract with the USAF to operate 5 USAF C-130Es out of U Tapao, Thailand, and to use them to fly supplies from U Tapao into the besieged city of Phnom Penh in Cambodia since September 74 (Robbins, Air America, pp.262-64). These five C-130Es came from the 464th TCW of Clark AFB, Philippines (faxes dated 14 June 2000, kindly sent to the author by Brigadier General Aderholt), while those C-130Es that were previously operated by Air America, had belonged to the 21st TCS, Ching Chuan Kang AB (Bowers, The USAF in South-East Asia, p.450). Two DC-6A/Bs were added in December 74 (N54CA msn 44428, withdrawn from use at Singapore in July 79; and N56CA msn 44696), and a third DC-6A/B (N27CA msn 43845, sold to A. G. Blake in May 79) together with C-47A N23BA (msn 9342; seen derelict at Bangkok in May 84) were added in September 75. At the same time, Bird Air also operated the remaining aircraft of the former fleet of Lao Air Development, i.e. one Bell 47G-3B-1, 2 Bell 206As, 4 Bell 206Bs, and Twin Bonanza N9316Y (for details of the fleet see JP Airline-Fleets 1978, p.157). During the evacuation of Vietnamese cities in 1975, there was one flight, when a Bird Air DC-6 carried 340 people on it (Robbins, Air America, p.275).

253 Apache N2267P was sold to Bud King, Australia, Wren N3790U was sold to Bira Air Transport, Bangkok (Memorandum “Competitive aircraft” of 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herb/B2), and Wren N2449R was sold as N8968. Cessna 180s XW-PED (msn 180-51863 ex N7963V), XW-PEM (2) (msn ?), XW-PEN (2) (msn ?), and XW-PFU (msn 180-51862 ex N7962V), all mentioned in an Air America confidential paper dated 26 May 72 without msn and all current in 1972 (in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C); the msn’s were supplied from “CASI Planes owned and operated in Laos, Thailand and Cambodia area” as of 3 May 71, in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 29. The anonymous Cessna 180 N713 used for training at Udorn and Vientiane in June 68 (Memorandum “Competitive aircraft” of 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herb/B2) may have been one of the 2 unknown aircraft.

254 Conboy, War in Laos, p.20, including a photo of the downed aircraft. Tom Ziemba of Air America Collectors’ Network gives the following details: “For a brief, fourteen month period starting in late 1966, CASI operated a single Fairchild-Hiller FH1100 helicopter throughout Laos for the Royal Lao Army, the Royal Thai Border Police (RTBP), Studies and Observation Group (SOG), and USAID. Fifteen additional FH1100’s were to be operated by CASI and dedicated to the RTBP. Due to manufacturing problems, only five FH1100’s were delivered. In 1967 CASI relinquished the FH1100 program in Thailand to the RTBP and in early 1968 terminated the CASI FH1100 program in Laos. Long rumored to be operating in other areas of Southeast Asia, the remaining FH1100 had suffered a rough landing and was then ‘pickled’ and stored by CASI at Wattay.
Pilatus Porters acquired by Bird & Sons, only 3 had survived in flying condition (XW-PCC, XW-PCE, and XW-PCI), although two of them were destroyed in 1967\(^{255}\) and 1969\(^{256}\). Four others of the original Bird Porters had been more or less severely damaged in some accidents and were sold as wrecks to Air America in 1966.\(^{257}\)

CASI PC-6 XW-PCE in the sixties
(in: UTD/Rich/B3)

airport in Vientiane, Laos for the duration of the war” (Quotation from http://www.air-america.net/casi-air3.htm, which also has a lot of photos of that operation, all taken by Bill Browder).


\(^{256}\) CASI PC-6A XW-PCE (msn 571) had already been damaged at Vientiane on 24 March 68 in a heavy thunderstorm (XOXO of 25 March 68, in: UTD/Hickler/B26F16), but was repaired and based at Vientiane in June 68 (Memorandum “Competitive information” dated 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2); but on 12 February 1969, it exploded in mid-air and crashed about 5 miles west of Ban Y (LS-187), Laos, killing, among others, Air America Operations Manager and observer Robert N. Crone (Memorial file, in: UTD/LaShomb/B16F3; Minutes of Meeting of Air Asia Co Ltd, Board of Review, in: UTD/CIA/B34F3).

\(^{257}\) PC-6 msn 554, the former XW-PBQ, had been a total write-off since 26 June 64; but it was sold to Air America, repaired and registered to them as N152L on 25 May 66 (Letter by Clyde S. Carter dated 25 April 72 in: UTD/CIA/B15F2). PC-6A msn 556, the former XW-PBL, had crashed near Luang Prabang, killing two (List of aircraft seen by Dr. Jonathan Pote in Laos, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 8 August 2008 by Dr. Pote), when it was sold to Air America in October 1965, but was rebuilt at a cost of $66,600 (Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committees of Air Asia Co Ltd and Air America Inc of 13 October 65, in: UTD/CIA/B7F4), and finally registered to Air America as N12235 in 1966; PC-6A msn 576, the former XW-PCH, was also a wreck, when it was sold to Air America, rebuilt and converted to Garrett power in 1966 at a cost of $80,000 + $12,858 = $92,858 (Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committees of Air Asia Co Ltd and Air America Inc of 26 January 66 and of 22 November 66, in: UTD/CIA/B8F1), and registered to Air America as N153L in 1966. Only PC-6A msn 567 seems to have been only slightly damaged, when it was sold to Air America in 1966, and so it could retain its Laotian registration XW-PCB.
As a consequence, no less than 22 additional Turbo Porters were acquired between December 1965 and 1974, most of them in the 1965-69 period.\footnote{Four PC-6As were acquired in December 65: \textbf{XW-PCK} (msn 591, ex HB-FCA); \textbf{XW-PCL} (msn 583, ex N1320R and N13202), which crashed just north of PS-47 on 29 June 71; the Thai pilot and 7 passengers, all interpreters, were killed (Log book of Allen Rich, in: UTD/Rich/B1); \textbf{XW-PCN} (msn 394 ex HB-FCB), which crashed on the drop zone in the Phou Kung Neua (LS-337), Laos, area on 14 July 73, killing the pilot and a kicker (log book of A. Rich, in: UTD/Rich/B1); and \textbf{XW-PCO} (msn 595 ex HB-FCC); this Porter was also destroyed in 1971 or 1972, as in March 71, it was still used on reconnaissance flights in the Luang Prabang (L-54) area (log book of Duane Keele, in: UTD/Keel/B1F6), while in May 72, it was no longer current (Company confidential dated 26 May 72, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C); reportedly crashed into a mountain west of LS-4 on 2 April 71 (Markus Herzig’s \textit{The Pilatus Porter World}, in: \texttt{http://www.pc-6.com/porterprod1.htm}). Two more PC-6Bs were acquired in early 1966: \textbf{XW-PCQ} (msn 602 ex HB-FCD), which was written off at an unknown date, and \textbf{XW-PCR} (msn 603 ex HB-FCE), which was destroyed between May 71 (CASI, planes owned and operated in Laos, Thailand and Cambodia area as of 3 May 71, in: UTD/Bison/B5, microfilm reel no. 29) and May 72 (Company confidential dated 26 May 72, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C); crashed west of LS-20A near Pha Khe (LS-51) on 1 December 71, making a rice drop (Tom Matthews, Diary, p. 20, formerly in: UTD/Leary/Ser.I, B8F13). Six more PC-6Bs followed in the second half of 1966: \textbf{XW-PDC} (msn 547 ex HB-FBU), which was also destroyed between June 68 (Memorandum “Competitive information” of 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2) and May 72 (Company confidential dated 26 May 72, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C); \textbf{XW-PDG} (msn 517 ex HB-FCI and D-ENLJ), which had already crashed at Moung Oum (LS-22), Laos, on 11 April 67 (log book of Allen Rich, in: UTD/Rich/B1), but was repaired, then crashed again on the runway of LS-272 in mid-March 72 (Tom Matthews, Diary, p. 23, formerly in: UTD/Leary/Ser.I, B8F13), and survived to become N62150 in 1974; \textbf{XW-PDI} (msn 620 ex HB-FCN), which also survived until 1974; \textbf{XW-PDJ} (msn 626 ex HB-FCP), which was destroyed between June 70, when it was used by Air America kicker Harold F. Miller (Flight crew member monthly reports of H. F. Miller, in: UTD/Miller/B4F6), and May 72 (Company confidential dated 26 May 72, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C); reportedly, it was written off along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in April 71 (Markus Herzig’s \textit{The Pilatus Porter World}, in: \texttt{http://www.pc-6.com/porterprod1.htm}); as well as \textbf{XW-PDK} (msn 631 ex HB-FCR) and \textbf{XW-PDL} (msn 632 ex HB-FCS), which, after being reregistered in August 67 as XW-PFC and XW-PFD respectively, both survived until 1974. The next batch of seven PC-6Bs was acquired between 1967 and 1969: The first one was the former Air Ventures PC-6B N13200 (msn 581), which became \textbf{XW-PFB} in May 67 and was sold to Sky of Siam, Udon Thani, as HS-CHE in April 74; four more PC-6Bs followed in 1968: \textbf{XW-PFQ} (msn 667 ex HB-FDR), \textbf{XW-PEF} (msn 672 ex HB-FEI), and \textbf{PC-6B XW-PFW} (msn 669 ex HB-FEH), all of which survived the war, plus \textbf{XW-PFR} (msn 668 ex HB-FDS), which was shot down near Sam Neua, Laos, on 9 May 73; the pilot, Emmet Kay, was captured and released only in September 74 (Robbins, \textit{Air America}, p.229-33; log book of Allen Rich, in: UTD/Rich/B1). The last two PC-6Bs of this batch followed in 1969, namely \textbf{XW-PEK} (msn 695 ex HB-FEX), which crashed and burned approximately 2 kms from Long Tieng (LS-20A), Laos, on 15 August 71 (the pilot, Prince Pethsarat, a nephew of King Bhumibol of Thailand, was killed).}
lived,259 and in May 1972, only 14 of them were still in use.260 This number was further reduced to 11 in late 1974, when all of the surviving Turbo Porters received civil US registrations on 19 September 1974.261 And in June 1977, many of those Turbo Porters that were still remaining with CASI were sold to the Royal Thai Army.262 A similar development of the fleet can be observed with CASI’s Beech Barons. While in September 1964, Bird & Sons had possessed only one Baron, as has been seen above, in July 1966, no less than eight

![CASI Porter XW-PCL at Sam Thong 9 January 66, still in Pilatus colors](http://www.pc-6.com/porterprod1.htm)

of the Lao Prime Minister and a former CASI C-46 First Officer, plus a Lao kicker were killed in the crash; see XOXO of 15 August 71 in: UTD/Hickler/B25F11), and XW-PEO (msn 704 ex HB-FFF), which survived the war. The last three known Porters of CASI were acquired between 1970 and 1974: XW-PGN (msn 705 ex HB-FFG) was registered in April 70, became N62162 in September 74, and was sold to Sky of Siam, Udon Thani, as HS-CHV(2) on 1 July 77; XW-PHG (msn 711 ex HB-FFX) was probably acquired in December 70 or early 71, was current in January 74 (log book of Allen Rich, in: UTD/Rich/B1), but has not been heard of since that time; reportedly, it was written off northwest of Sam Thong on 1 July 74 (Markus Herzig’s The Pilatus Porter World, in: http://www.pc-6.com/porterprod1.htm); and XW-PKI (msn 2011 ex N352F) was acquired after May 72, became N62157 in September 74, and was sold to the Royal Thai Army in July 77. The identities of these Porters can be found in: Burnett/Davis/Slack, South-East Asia civil aircraft registers, pp.232-34.


260 XW-PCI, PCN, PDG, PDI, PEF, PEO, PFQ, FFW, PGN, and PHG (Air America’s Company confidential dated 26 May 72, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C).

261 On 19 September 1974, several CASI Porters were reregistered in the United States, probably to secure property rights in the most instable political situation that reigned in Laos: XW-PCI (msn 523) was reregistered as N62158, XW-PDG (msn 517) as N62150; XW-PDI (msn 620) as N62154; XW-PFC (msn 631) as N62148; XW-PFD (msn 632) as N62153; XW-PEF (msn 672) as N62149; XW-PEO (msn 704) as N62160; XW-PFG (msn 667) as N62156; XW-PFW (msn 669) as N62161; XW-PGN (msn 705) as N62162; and XW-PKI (msn 2011) as N62157 (see Aviation Letter 103, June 75, p.13; US Register Review 1975, pp.72/3).

262 For details see Steve Darke’s file about the aircraft of the Royal Thai Army at http://www.thai-aviation.net/military-RTA.htm. Some former CASI Porters also found civilian customers, as did, for example, XW-PDI (msn 620) or XW-PEF (msn 672), which after flying with CASI as N62154 and N62149, were sold to Viking Helicopters of Ottawa as C-GXIL and C-GXIthanky respectively in November 1976.
of them were registered to CASI. In June 1968, CASI still had nine Barons, most of which were based at Saigon and leased to Air Vietnam. Finally, in May 72, still six Barons are known to have been in use with CASI. As to the Dornier Do-28s, only 2 of the 4 aircraft

263 Les Strouse recalls that “the Baron met a water buffalo on the runway. The buffalo won. It ran away minus one horn. The Baron went nowhere for some time” (e-mail dated 14 February 2014 kindly sent to the author by Les Strouse).

264 A total of 8 Beech Barons – most of them of the A55 model – was registered to Continental Air Services, Reno on the FAA US Civil Aircraft Register of 1 July 1966: ownership details from FAA sources were kindly sent to the author by Steve Darke on 10 August 2015: N224J msn TC-236, bought on 7 February 66 (damaged at Vientiane on 24 March 68 in a heavy thunderstorm [XOXO of 25 March 68, in: UTD/Hickler/B26F16], but repaired and sold to Bira Air Transport, Bangkok, as HS-PBB in April 68 [Memorandum “Competitive information” of 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2]); N1313Z msn TC-125 (bought on 29 January 66); N1335Z msn TC-135; N1349Z msn TC-172; N1462G msn TC-250 (bought on 12 February 66); N1563Z msn TC-223; N9506Y msn TC-331 (not current in June 68; see Memorandum “Competitive information” of 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2); and N9781Y msn TC-437 (not current in June 68; see Memorandum “Competitive information” of 18 June 68, but still listed as operating in South Vietnam in CIA doc. at http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1818029/196847.pdf).

265 In June 68, CASI’s Baron fleet comprised two aircraft operating into Laos out of Udorn (N1778G msn TC-303, bought on 1 March 67, and N4681 msn TC-309, bought on 16 February 67, ex N46B), while seven Barons were leased to Air Vietnam: N522C (msn TC-415, acquired in 1967; this aircraft later crashed in Nong Khai province, N.E. Thailand, on 5 January 69, killing 2 people), N1313Z (msn TC-125), N1335Z (msn TC-135; not current in May 72), N1349Z (msn TC-172; canx on 29 June 70; no reason recorded; no fate known; not current in May 72), N1462G (msn TC-250), N1563Z (msn TC-223; not current in May 72), and N9361Y (msn TC-19, but regd. to Cross Roads Aviation, Dallas TX in the FAA’s US Civil Aircraft Register of 1 July 69, vol. II, p.1721) as is stated by the Memorandum “Competitive information” of 18 June 68 (in: UTD/Herd/B2). The Company confidential dated 26 May 72 (in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C) gives six Barons as being operated by CASI in Laos: N4681 msn TC-309 (to Crown International Inc, Omaha, NE on 31 May 74); N1462G msn TC-250 (to Crown International Inc, Omaha, NE on 31 May 74; later sold to M. B. Elises, Manila, as RP-C1333); N1313Z msn TC-125 (sold to Crown International Inc, Omaha, NE on 6 August74; to Universal Air as RP-C1221 in May 76); N1778G msn TC-303 (request 31Oct73 to FAA to cancel on export to Laos; canx 15Nov73 to Laos; to XW-TFO; General (Division Commander) Vang Pao; canx 25Nov75; BoS from Vang Pao to Brigadier General Harry C. Aderholt 26Apr78; restored as N1778G; CofR for N1778G to Brigadier General Harry C.
originally bought by Bird & Sons had survived the take-over by Continental, and both of them were transferred to Boun Oum Airways. Do-28 N9181X (msn 3084), which had been delivered on 3 August 65, i.e. just prior to the take-over, was the first of a total of seven new Do-28B-1s delivered in late 1965 and early 1966, to which was added the former Air America Do-28A N4224G (msn 3021) that had returned to its lessor, Foreign Air Transport Development, on 12 September 65. Up to two of these Do-28s were used out of Savannakhet (L-39) to relay the signals sent up by the road watcher teams hidden along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, before this task was transferred to Air America’s Volpards in March 67, after one of the Do-28s had crashed at Savannakhet. Probably two of these Do-28s also joined the fleet of Boun Oum Airways, while two more were already destroyed after a couple of months. In June 1968, only 5 Do-28s remained in service with CASI, one of which was still with Boun Oum Airways, while two of them were leased to Air Vietnam and based at Saigon. In May 72, only one of the Do-28s remained in Laos, XW-PCI, and this one was moth balled, so that it had to be reregistered as XW-PKM, when it was reactivated in late 1972; but in October 73, it was sold as N89AC. At least XW-PCT (msn 3058),

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Aderholt (c/o Sea Thai Ltd, Bangkok) 06Jun78]; canx 27Feb79 to Thailand; possibly that displayed at Bang Kachai, Chantaburi); N7303 msn TC-236 (sold to Aircraft Modification & Parts Center Inc, Burbank, CA on 4 October 76) and N5700K msn TC-702; a photo of CASI Baron N5702K msn TC-711 (bought on 16 January 69; to Crown International Inc, Omaha, NE on 6 August 74) probably taken at Udorn in 1972 can be found in the collection of A. Cates preserved at TTU (no. VA024854).

268 The other six Do-28B-1s were: N9180X msn 3060, delivered on 9 November 65; N9184X msn 3058, N9185X msn 3059, and N9183X msn 3086, all delivered on 29 December 65; N9182X msn 3087, delivered in late 1965 or early 1966; and N9186X msn 3089, delivered on 4 March 66 (Letter of 28 April 1995 written to the author by Daimler-Benz Aerospace).

267 Do-28A N4224G (msn 3021) returned from Air America to its lessor, Foreign Air Transport Development of Washington, on 12 September 65 (Aircraft status of 1 November 65, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); although it was reported as being sold to Bird & Sons, Vientiane, as XW-PBJ, it most certainly became XW-PCI with CASI in September 65. This is believed for 2 reasons: a) XW-PBJ should have been registered in 1962/3, not in September 65; and b) as Do-28 msn the 3021 survived with CASI until at least 1973, it must be listed in the Memorandum “Competitive information” of 18 June 68 (in: UTD/Herd/B2), and there are only two candidates: XW-PCI and XW-PCT, but XW-PCT is known to have been msn 3058 (List of aircraft seen by Dr. Jonathan Pote in Laos, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 8 August 2008 by Dr. Pote); the US registration N4224G was cancelled only in 1968/9; it does not appear on the FAA’s US Civil Aircraft Register of 1 July 69.

266 The other six Do-28B-1s were: N9180X msn 3060, delivered on 9 November 65; N9184X msn 3058, N9185X msn 3059, and N9183X msn 3086, all delivered on 29 December 65; N9182X msn 3087, delivered in late 1965 or early 1966; and N9186X msn 3089, delivered on 4 March 66 (Letter of 28 April 1995 written to the author by Daimler-Benz Aerospace).

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264 E-mail dated 20 July 2001 kindly sent to the author by Frank Bonansinga.

263 Do-28A XW-PCI (probably msn 3021) was current with Boun Oum Airways, Udorn, in June 68 (Memorandum “Competitive information” of 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2); the other Do-28 may have been XW-PCT, which was msn 3058 ex N9184X (List of aircraft seen by Dr. Jonathan Pote in Laos, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 8 August 2008 by Dr. Pote).

262 Do-28B-1 N9180X (msn 3060) went missing en route from Luang Prabang (L-54) and Ban Houei Sai (L-25) on 6 April 67, when piloted by John Preston; 6 passengers were on board (log book of Allen Rich, in. UTD/Rich/B1); Do-28 N9183X (msn 3086), which had already crashed at QB 3699, Laos, on 9 April 67, searching too low, injuring the pilot, Skip Bryan, and 2 passengers (see the log book of Allen Rich), was lost in April 68 (Memorandum “Competitive information” of 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2); and Do-28 N9186X (msn 3089), was also lost in March 68 (Memorandum “Competitive information” of 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2).

261 In June 68, XW-PCI was based at Udorn and leased to Boun Oum Airways, N9182X and N9185X were based at Vientiane, and N9181X and XW-PCT were based at Saigon and leased to Air Vietnam (Memorandum “Competitive information” of 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2). Previously, CASI’s second Do-28 in SVN was N9182X (see http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1818029/196847.pdf ).

272 Company confidential dated 26 May 72, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C.

271 Burnett/Slack/Davis, South-East Asia civil aircraft registers, p.234.
N9181X (msn 3084), and N9185X (msn 3059) were still based at Saigon in early 1975, and while two of them were sold the same year, XW-PCT returned to service in Laos, where it was destroyed in a storm at Vientiane on 24 March 76. In 1970, Continental Air Services also operated an unknown Cessna 310, which was used to take photos of the Air America C-130A which had crashed at Phou Bia Mountain on 10 April 70. Finally, Beech H18 N906T (msn BA-667), which had been based at Saigon since late 65 and leased to Air Vietnam in June 68, was sold in 1975, after it had been supplemented by Beech H18 N18843 (msn BA-750).

CASI Do-28 N9180X at Sam Thong on 9 January 66, still in Bird & Sons colors (with kind permission from the photographer: Dr. Jonathan Pote)

As to the bigger aircraft, the two Twin Pioneers inherited from Bird & Sons, the rice-dropper XW-PBJ (msn 564) and the passenger aircraft XW-PBP (msn 567), were operated by Continental Air Services for some time, until both of them were damaged beyond repair in a storm at Vientiane on 24 March 76.

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274 Letter of 28 April 1995 written by Daimler-Benz Aerospace to the author. It is unknown, what happened to N9182X (msn 3087).

275 N9181X was sold to the Department of Public Works and Communications, Manila, as RP-1220 in March 75 (Burnett/Slack/Davis, South-East Asia civil aircraft registers, p.127); N9185X was sold to Sky of Siam, Udon Thani, as HS-CHI on 8 September 75 (Burnett/Slack/Davis, South-East Asia civil aircraft registers, p.32); it was written off on the army range in Kanchanaburi province on 22 October 79; and XW-PCT was destroyed in a storm at Vientiane on 24 March 76 (Aviation Letter 114, May 1976, p.3).

276 E-mail dated 20 December 2001, kindly sent to the author by Frank Bonansinga; this aircraft was no longer current on 26 May 72 (Company confidential dated 26 May 72, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C); its fate is unknown.

277 When N906T was at Vientiane for overhaul in January 66, it had the Air Vietnam insignia on the tail and the insignia of the 390th Tactical Fighter Squadron (Vietnam) on the fuselage (List of aircraft seen by Dr. Jonathan Pote in Laos, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 8 August 2008 by Dr. Pote). In June 68, it was still based at Saigon and leased to Air Vietnam (Memorandum “Competitive information” of 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2); in 1975, it was sold to Sky of Siam Ltd, Udon Thani, as HS-CHP (JP Airline-fleets 1982, p.117), after it had been supplemented by Beech H18 N18843 (see JP Airline-fleets 1978, p.170).
heavy thunderstorm at Vientiane on 24 March 68. 278 The total number of C-46s was reduced to three aircraft (N67961, N1447, and XW-TDG) 279 owned, plus the two grant C-46s on loan from the Royal Lao Government (XW-PBV and XW-PBW), 280 and in June 1968, most of these C-46s were based at Vientiane. At the same time, the C-47 became the new backbone of Continental Air Services, probably, because Continental Air Lines was phasing out its own DC-3s, so that some of them could be transferred to CASI. 281 Nevertheless, four of the C-47s acquired between 1964 and 1966 did not survive the next couple of years, 282 but in June 68,

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278 XOXO of 25 March 68 in: UTD/Hickler/B26F16; Love, Wings of Air America, p.80.
279 Of the 4 C-46s inherited from Bird & Sons, that is N4871V (msn 22410), N9473Z (msn 22293), N9760Z (msn 22574), and N67961 (msn 22512), N4871V had already been broken up for spares at Vientiane before 1965 (see the photo above); N9473Z crashed after an engine failure near Phu Cun, Laos, on 13 August 67; the left engine was hit by ground fire after the loss of the right engine (Davis/Martin/Whittle, The Curtiss C-46 Commando, p.109); N9760Z was damaged at Vientiane in a heavy thunderstorm on 24 March 68 (XOXO of 25 March 68, in: UTD/Hickler/B26F16); in June 1968, it was probably still not repaired, but it was current again in May 72 (Company confidential dated 26 May 72, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C); C-46F N1447 (msn 22561) was acquired in September 67 to replace N9473Z and was equally damaged in the thunderstorm on 24 March 68, but it was flying again in June 68 and based at Vientiane; and C-46F XW-TDG (msn 22598) was the former XW-PFF of Royal Air Lao, acquired in April 68 and based at Udorn in June 68 (Davis/Martin/Whittle, The Curtiss C-46 Commando, p.120; Memorandum “Competitive information” of 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2).
280 C-46Ds XW-PBV (msn 22232) and XW-PBW (msn 33451) were both rice-drop aircraft leased from the Royal Lao Government since the times of Bird & Sons. XW-PBV had received some damage to the rudder and horizontal stabilizer at Vientiane in the thunderstorm of 24 March 68, as is documented by some photos in the collection of Dave Hickler, but was flying again in June 68 (XOXO of 24 March 68 in: UTD/Hickler/B26F16). Both aircraft were transferred to Air America in 1969, with whom they remained, until they were given to Royal Air Lao on 1 December 1973 (Flight Operations Circular of 1 December 73, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C).
281 N620Z, N64422, and N7781C came from Continental Air Lines.
282 The two former Bird & Sons C-47s N7780C (msn 25736) and N7781C (msn 26763) were still registered to Continental Air Services on the FAA’s US Civil Aircraft Register at least between 1 July 66 and 1 July 69, but both were not listed as current in June 68 (Memorandum “Competitive information” of 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2); N7780C became XW-PAP around 1962 and still existed in 1968 (List of aircraft seen by Dr. Jonathan Pote in Laos, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 8 August 2008 by Dr. Pote; Memorandum “Competitive information” of 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2). N7781C was last reported as with CASI in 1965 (J.M. Gradidge, The Douglas DC-1/DC-2/DC-3. The first seventy years, vol. II, p.571); this was probably the Boun Oum C-47 that was destroyed in December 65. C-47A N8744R (msn 20156) was also acquired in late 65, was seen at Thakhek West in November 65 (List of aircraft seen by Dr. Jonathan Pote in Laos, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 8 August 2008 by Dr. Pote), but reportedly crashed at Sam Neua, Laos, on 17 April 1966 (Gradidge, vol. II, p.493), although it remained on the FAA’s US Civil Aircraft Register at least between 1 July 66 and 1 July 69. This C-47 was probably on loan to Boun Oum Airways, when it crashed, and is believed to have been the one that was shot down near a drop zone northeast of Ban Song (LS-29), Laos, on 17 April 66 (log book of Allen Rich, in: UTD/Rich/B1). C-47A N79971 (msn 13184) was acquired in 1965 and also listed on the US Civil Aircraft Register between at least 1 July 66 and 1 July 69, but equally not listed as current in June 1968; Gradidge (vol. II, p.435) gives it as reregistered as XW-PDG in August 66, but XW-PDG was Porter msn 517 current in June 68. C-47 N719A (msn 4309) was also acquired in 1966 (Gradidge, vol. II, p.324), also remained on the FAA’s US Civil Aircraft Register at least between 1 July 66 and 1 July 69, and was equally not listed as current in June 1968 (Memorandum “Competitive information” of 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2). CASI C-47 XW-PDF (whose identity is unknown, but which was probably registered around June 1966) was lost in March 68 (Memorandum “Competitive information” of 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2), and CASI C-47 XW-PDH (whose identity is equally unknown, but which was also registered around June 1966) was lost in May 68 (Memorandum “Competitive information” of 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2). XW-PDF and XW-PDH were probably N79971 and N719A (or vice-versa) reregistered in 1966.

57
there were still 3 of them (N650K, XW-PAP, and XW-PDE)\textsuperscript{283} that were based at Udorn,

\begin{center}
CASI Twin Pioneer XW-PBP at Sam Thong 9 January 66
(with kind permission from the photographer: Dr. Jonathan Pote)
\end{center}

\begin{center}
CASI C-46 N9760Z (still in Bird & Sons colors) damaged at Vientiane on 24 March 68
(UTD/Hickler/B33)
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{283} C-47s \textbf{XW-PAP} (msn 25736; this was the former Bird C-47 N7780C, reregistered around 1962), \textbf{XW-PDE} (msn 10160; this was the former CASI C-47 N560, reregistered on 14 June 66), and \textbf{N650K} (msn 13174, acquired in 1965). See Memorandum “Competitive information” of 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2.

58
Royal Lao Govt C-46s XW-PBV and XW-PBW operated by CASI at Vientiane on 4 June 66 (with kind permission from the photographer: Dr. Jonathan Pote)

CASI C-47s N650K (Sam Thong 9 Jan. 66) and XW-PAP (Thakhek West 20 March 66) while no less than 7 CASI C-47s were based at Saigon and leased to Air Vietnam. Five more C-47s were acquired in 1968/69, to which a sixth one was added in 1974. 

284 More photos of CASI aircraft can be found at [http://www.air-america.net/casi-air.htm](http://www.air-america.net/casi-air.htm).

285 The 7 CASI C-47s based at Saigon in June 1968 and leased to Air Vietnam (see Memorandum “Competitive information” of 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2) were: N55L (msn 26675, see at Saigon on 14 May 66; see List of aircraft seen by Dr. Jonathan Pote in Laos, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 8 August 2008 by Dr. Pote), N620Z (msn 25234, acquired on 31 March 67), N4995E (msn 12039, acquired in 1967), N64422 (msn 19476, acquired on 12 August 66), N64910 (msn 20062, acquired in late 65 and seen at Vientiane on 24 Sept. 65; see List of aircraft seen by Dr. Jonathan Pote in Laos, e-mail kindly sent to the author on 8 August 2008 by Dr. Pote), N65385 (msn 20542, acquired in 1966), and N67674 (msn 16823/33571, acquired in November 66; all of these C-47s are identified according to J.M. Gradidge, *The Douglas DC-1/DC-2/DC-3. The first seventy years*, vol.2, by their msn.

286 Three C-47s were bought from TAA: XW-PFT (msn 12539 ex VH-SBE) was acquired on 21 May 68; XW-PFV (msn 11971 ex VH-SBC) on 4 July 68; and XW-PEE (msn 13622 ex VH-SBJ) on 10 October 68; two more C-47s were acquired in 1969, but their identities are unknown: XW-PGJ (msn ?) crashed at Long Tieng (LS-20A) on 2 January 70 (Burnett/Slack/Davis, *South-East Asia civil aircraft registers*, p.235), when it was leased to Xieng Khouang Air Transport, Vang Pao’s own airline, and XW-PGK (msn ?) was no longer current in May 72 (Company confidential dated 26 May 72, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C). Finally, C-47A N11AF (msn 13817) was added on 2 February 74; it was the former B-933 of Air America, now leased from Air Alliance; it did not stay very long, however, as in September 74, it was leased to Sahakol Air of Bangkok, until it was sold to Air Fast Services of Singapore-Seletar in 1975. A photo of N11AF in Air Fast service appeared in *Propliner* 64, autumn 1995, p.29.
On 3 May 1971, CASI operated 3 C-46s (N9760Z, N67961, and N1447), 5 Barons (N1313Z, N1778G, N4681, N1462G, N5700K), and 17 Turbo Porters out of Vientiane, CASI, planes owned and operated in Laos, Thailand and Cambodia area as of 3 May 71 (in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 29)

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and 3 C-47s (N650K, XW-PDE, and XW-PFT), 2 Cessna 180Hs (XW-PED, XW-PFU), as well as 2 PA-18 Super Cubs (XW-PEM, XW-PEN) out of Udorn. At that time, CASI operated at least 2 C-47s (N4995E – which had become XU-AAD in 1970/1 and was operated by CASI for Khmer Akas Airlines – and N55L) in Cambodia, while the fleet that CASI operated in South Vietnam at that time is unknown. Later the same month, that is on 31 May 71, Air America’s Company Confidential no. CSY/VTE-71-336 about “Non-AAM aircraft operating in Laos” does not list any CASI Porter at all, but adds CASI Twin Otters XW-PGV and XW-PHF; XW-PEM and XW-PEN are now given not as Piper Cubs, but as 2 additional Cessna 180s, and former CASI C-46 XW-TDG is now given as “operated by Lao Air Charter with Khemara Air Transport colors”. Bell 206 “14G” (i.e. N4014G), Bell 47 “52N” (i.e. N6252N), and Cessna 150s XW-PGS, XW-PGT, and XW-PGU are now given as with Lao Air Development, owned by Bill Bird. In the summer of 1972, several CASI C-47s, including XW-PDE, were equipped as an electronic warfare aircraft to intercept communist radio traffic over northern Laos (Project “Brush Cargo”). But over the years, the fleet of C-47s flown by CASI was also reduced: Eight of CASI’s C-47s disappeared before 1972, and their fates are unknown, although some of them may have turned up with Laotian registrations and flown in Laos or Cambodia. Three others are known to have entered the aviation scene in Cambodia, where they flew support missions for the cities and pro-Western forces besieged by the Communists, and a further three of them went to Sahakol Air of Bangkok in 1973 and 1974. The last CASI C-47 to remain was XW-PFV (msn 11971), which had already been reregistered as N7302 on 9 October 68; even after the end of the war in Vietnam, N7302 remained in service in Thailand, until it was sold to Commercial Airfreight Inc, Westminster, CA, on 16 April 79.

288 CASI, planes owned and operated in Laos, Thailand and Cambodia area as of 3 May 71, in: UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 29.
290 Conboy, War in Laos, p.56, which also contains a photo of XW-PDE. Tom Ziemba of Air America Collectors’ Network notes: “One unusual and highly successful mission for CASI pilots known as Project BRUSH CARGO (PFT-05) involved flying specially equipped DC-3s over northern Laos to intercept enemy radio signals.” (in: http://www.air-america.net/casi-hist.htm).
291 C-47s XW-PAP (msn 25736), XW-PGK (msn ?), and N67674 (msn 16823/33571) were no longer current with CASI in May 1972 (Air America’s Company Confidential dated 26 May 72, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C), but their fates are unknown. N67674 was cancelled from the US Civil Aircraft Register on 7 July 70. C-47 N55L (msn 26675) crashed at Phnom Penh on 14 February 71, the fate of N64910 (msn 20062) is unknown, but the aircraft was cancelled on 29 October 71. N620Z (msn 25234) was cancelled from the US register in 1970 and reportedly went to Sahakol Air of Thailand. XW-PEE (msn 13622) was reregistered as N13622 in March 69 and sold to Air Alliance, Los Angeles, in December 70 (possibly a financial transaction only), but its subsequent fate is unknown. And N65385 (msn 20542) was reported as being without engines in Laos in May 72 (Company confidential dated 26 May 72, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C), so it was probably broken up for spares (most details according to J. M. Gradidge, by their msn).
292 N4995E (msn 12039) became XU-AAD already in 1970/1; but XW-PDE (msn 10160) and XW-PFT (12539) were sold to South East Asia Air Transport, Phnom Penh, as N82AC and N83AC respectively in November 73.
293 N64422 (msn 19476) was sold to Air Alliance, Los Angeles, in 1972, which leased it to Sahakol Air of Bangkok in April 73, before it found its way to the Tri-9-Corporation of Phnom Penh later that year. N650K (msn 13174), which had been sold to Air Alliance, Los Angeles, in 1973, was leased to Sahakol Air of Bangkok, from September 74 to November 75, and after another year with CASI at Bangkok, it was sold to Yemen Airways as 4W-ABY on 9 December 76. And CASI’s last C-47, N11AF (msn 13817), went to Sahakol Air of Bangkok in September 74.
Companies other than Air America that flew in Laos in May 72 (part 1+2) (Company Confidential dated 26 May 72, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C)
As to the C-46s operated by Continental Air Services, the two grant C-46s (XW-PBV and XW-PBW) were transferred to Air America in 1969, and C-46F N67961 was reportedly destroyed in 1969, but probably only damaged, reducing their number to three. But in June 1971, CASI received three more C-46As from Fred Olsen,294 which allowed them to dispose of their older C-46s during the next couple of years: In 1972, N9760F was sold to the Tri-9 Corporation for use in Cambodia and XW-TDG to Air Union of Viетniane, while N1447 continued with CASI until 1974, when it was sold to Royal Air Lao / Air Union as XW-PMF.295 The former Fred Olsen C-46s continued to be operated in Laos even after the cease-fire agreement, but in July 74, all of them received US registrations.296 They further continued to fly into Laos, now mostly from their base at Bangkok, and on 12 and 15 April 1975, just some days prior to the fall of Phnom Penh, Allen Rich flew CASI C-46 N335CA from Saigon to Phnom Penh to pick up press people and to remove the last evacuees. But after Saigon had also fallen to the Communists on 30 April 75, CASI’s C-46s were only used to fly between Bangkok and Singapore,297 until they were sold to Amco Air International in February and March 1976.

This constant reduction of CASI’s fleet of bigger aircraft was not the result of competition from Air America. In part, it was, of course, due to the withdrawal of the American Military from South East Asia, but it can also be explained by the fact that since 1965, CASI had introduced some newer types of aircraft. The first of them was a couple of L.382B Hercules (N9260R msn 4101 and N9261R msn 4109), which were leased from Lockheed in late 1965.

CASI L.382B Hercules N9260R unloading ammunition at Thakhek West in November 65
(with kind permission from the photographer: Dr. Jonathan Pote)

Ed Eckholdt ferried L.382B N9261R from Marietta, GA to Vientiane via Portland, Honolulu, Wake, Guam, and Clark on 25 and 26 November 65. After some area familiarization, he shuttled between Vientiane (L-08) and Moung Soui (L-108) in December 65 in N9261R, and then made air drops at various places (LS-69A, LS-148, LS-142, LS-118A, LS-169 etc.) in January 66. Other flights he made in N9261R between January and May 66 included rice

294 XW-PHL (msn 27049 ex LN-FOP), XW-PHM (msn 30252 ex LN-FOR), and XW-PHN (msn 30257 ex LN-FOS) were acquired in June 71.

295 On 13 March 75, it was reported missing en-route Hong Kong – Vientiane, but it defected to Bangkok, where it was seen with Red Cross titles on 24 June 75; after some years of storage there, it became HS-SKD of Sahakol Air, Bangkok, on 17 November 78.

296 XW-PHL became N335CA, XW-PHM became N336CA, and XW-PHN became N337CA.

drops flown out of Vientiane, and flights to Moung Soui, Seno, Saravane, Pakse, Luang Prabang, and Long Tieng – many of them out of Vientiane, but many flights also via Udorn, suggesting military cargo picked up at “Peppergrinder”. But the L.382Bs did not remain very long, probably because they were too big for an operation in Laos. So, between 27 May and 1 June 66, Ed Eckholdt ferried N9261R from Vientiane back to Atlanta, GA, via Clark, Guam, Wake, Honolulu, and Los Angeles. In August 1966, both CASI L.382Bs went to Zambian Air Cargo as 9J-RCV and 9J-RCY.

Pages from Ed Eckholdt’s log book showing the ferry and first missions of CASI’s L-382Bs (in: UTD/Leary/B44F13)

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The next new type of aircraft to join CASI’s fleet was a Shorts SC-7 Skyvan, which arrived in January 1969 on lease from Shorts. Intended to become XW-PEK, it was registered N3201 (msn SH.1848) instead for use out of Saigon, until it became XW-PGL in July 1970 for use in Laos, where it remained until it returned to Shorts in November 1972.  

And on 17 September 1970, the first of four former Saber Air DHC-6 Twin Otters was registered to Continental Air Services as XW-PGV (msn 266 ex 9V-BCE), followed by three others in April, August and September 1971. Mostly, these Twin Otters were operated on drop missions, sometimes, they were used to fly troops or to pick up survivors from firebases that had been overrun by Communist forces, and sometimes they had to fly cover for besieged locations. For example, on 18 and 19 December 71, a CASI Twin Otter dropped ammunition to the besieged Unity troops (Bataillon Commando 609) on top of Phou Theung near FSB Lion. Another example: In the late evening of 31 December 71, Ed Dearborn circled in Twin Otter XW-PHV above Long Tieng (LS-20A) for several hours to fly cover for Vang Pao’s headquarters, which was under heavy rocket attack. And on 24 April 72, XW-PGV flew the last men of GM 22 from LS-63 back to Long Tieng. But on 19 January 72, XW-PHS (msn 285) was cancelled from the Laotian register, became “A060” – probably a storage code at Singapore –, and returned to CASI in the summer, when it was reregistered as XW-PKH on 20 July 72. After the cease-fire agreement of February 73, CASI also began to phase out its Twin Otters; the first to leave was XW-PKH in July 73, followed by XW-PH and XW-PHP in January 74, and the last to go was XW-PGV, which went to Omni Aircraft Sales of Washington as N85TC in September 74.

The missions flown by Continental Air Services were essentially the same as those flown by Air America – supply drops, arms drops, medical evacuation, support of General Vang Pao’s army, and reconnaissance flights for the US Military – but on a much smaller scale.

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300 The other three DHC-6 Twin Otters were: XW-PHF (msn 274 ex 9V-BCF, registered on 8 April 71), XW-PHS (msn 280 ex 9V-BCJ, registered on 7 August 71), and XW-PHS (msn 285 ex 9V-BCL, registered on 7 September 71); this information was sent to the author by His Royal Highness, Prince Tiao Sisouphannouvong, Director of Civil Aviation of the Kingdom of Laos, in his letter dated 8 June 1972.

301 On 2 August 1972, for example, Twin Otter XW-PGV operated in zone ALPHA, while XW-PHP operated in zone BRAVO on USAID supply drop missions (Vientiane daily flight schedule of 2 August 72, in: UTD/Severson/B1F7). Zone ALPHA comprised locations like Sam Thong (LS-20) or Pa Doung (LS-5), so was south of the Plain of Jars; zone BRAVO comprised locations like Ban Na (LS-15) or Xieng Dat (LS-117), so was west of the Plain of Jars (see the list “Rice/wheat requirements for November 64”, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F8).

302 Conboy / Morrison, Shadow war, pp.324/5.

303 Hamilton-Merritt, Tragic mountains, pp.277-82.

304 Tom Matthews, Diary, p. 34, formerly in: UTD/Leary/Ser.I, B8F13.

305 The registrations of CASI’s Twin Otters were cancelled on the following dates: XW-PKH on 30 July 73, XW-PHF on 16 January 74, and XW-PHP on 10 January 74; this information was sent to the author by His Royal Highness, Prince Tiao Sisouphannouvong, Director of Civil Aviation of the Kingdom of Laos, in his letter dated 23 April 1974. These three Twin Otters returned to their former 9V- registrations. Twin Otter XW-PHS was seen at Singapore-Seletar on 19 January 72 (Aviation Letter no. 64, March 72, p.23); between January and July 72, it used the code “A060” (Aviation Letter no.72, November 72, p.13); on 5 July 72, it was repainted at Seletar as XW-PKH (Aviation Letter no.70, September 72, p.5). “A060” may have been a storage code. As of 15 February 70, Air America had 34 aircraft (10 C-123Ks, 8 C-46s, 5 Caribous, 1 Volpar, 2 Porters, and 8 Helios) flying in Laos under USAID contracts 439-342 and 439-401 – compared to 9 CASI aircraft (3 C-46, 1 Baron, and 5 Porters) operating in Laos under USAID contract 439-673 on 1 January 70 (see CIA doc. at [http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1818029/197004.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1818029/197004.pdf)).
Former CASI pilot Lee Gossett recalls: “CASI did exactly the same missions as Air America and most of our STOL work was for the Agency, up country. CASI had the sole Agency contract for the STOL work out of Pakse in the South, which included night drops along the trail most nights. We operated 4 Porters out of Pakse. At LS-20A, the big Agency base North of Vientiane, we flew extensively for the Agency. CASI was the first to fly the Twin Otters in Laos under Agency contract. CASI had 3 operating up country before Air America brought over their first one. As you know, Air America lost one of their Twin Otters in a fatal crash not far from LS-20A. The pilot, Ben Coleman was a good friend of mine. CASI had the sole Agency contract out of L-54, Luang Prabang and we operated between 2 and 3 Porters there for the sole purpose of supplying rice and hard rice to the troops up North.”

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Letter dated 8 June 72, kindly sent to the author by His Royal Highness, Prince Tiao Sisouphannouvong, Director of Civil Aviation of the Kingdom of Laos

E-mail dated 28 June 2006, kindly sent to the author by Lee Gossett.

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CASI PC-6 XW-PEF in the early seventies (UTD/Rich/B3)

This is confirmed by what can be found in the log book of Allen Rich, who flew CASI Porters between March 69 and July 71: Several CASI Porters were regularly based at Pakse (L-11) in the south, and these aircraft sometimes made night drops near the Ho Chi Minh Trail, probably to road watcher teams. Other Porters were stationed at Long Tieng (LS-20A) and Luang Prabang (L-54), and after the fall of Long Tieng also at Ban Xon (LS-272). Some flights included shuttles – on 1 June 69, Allen Rich shuttled between Moung Cha (LS-113) and Houei Tong Ko (LS-184) in Porter XW-PEK, some Porters dropped leaflets and watched the movements on the Trail – that is what Allen Rich did when working out of Savannakhet (L-39) on 16 and 17 January 70 in Porter XW-PFC and out of Pakse (L-11) on 15 February 70 in XW-PFQ, and some Porters working out of Luang Prabang (L-54) made night drops out of Pakse (L-11) on 14 and 15 March 69 using CASI Porter XW-PFD, on 22 March 69 using XW-PFQ, on 12 April 69 using XW-PDG, on 21 April 69 using XW-PDC in a night drop and an infil mission, and so on (Log book of Allen Rich, at: UTD/Rich/B1).
drops around Nam Bac (LS-203) and to positions watching the new Chinese road: Allen Rich flew such missions out of Luang Prabang from 2 to 5 February 70 in Porter CASI XW-PCN.\textsuperscript{309} As former CASI pilot Lee Gossett notes, there was a special group of Porters that was based at Savannakhet (L-39): “There were, as I remember, [4] CASI Porters being flown out of there and flown exclusively by Thai pilot. Seldom did the Thai pilots fly in other areas and they did a lot of night drops, supporting the road watch teams along the trail. CASI mechanics maintained the Thai flown Porters in L-39 and when they required heavy maintenance, they would return to L-08, Vientiane CASI for work.”\textsuperscript{310} In the late sixties, 3 Thai-piloted CASI Porters and 2 Thai-piloted Air America UH-34Ds were stationed at Savannakhet. The Porters were used to drop bundles to a single team. They were rigged with an inverted platform that allowed the pilot to drop with great accuracy and no kicker was required. The drops usually consisted of food, batteries for radios, cigarettes and other “comfort” in specially rigged parcels.\textsuperscript{311}

CASI’s Twin Otters were used to fly very “hairy” combat cargo missions supplying fire bases that were pounded by Communist gun fire. On his way home to the US in a Pan American clipper, Continental’s Twin Otter pilot Ed Dearborn vividly described on 23 December 71, what he had experienced 3 days before during the battle for the Plain of Jars: “On the night of December 17th, NVA forces launched a full scale attack against fire base Tom Tom. On the morning of December 18th, three CAS Otters with Captains Taylor, Cloud and Clark were dispatched to Alternate per the usual schedule. On arrival at Alternate, they were briefed that the NVA had launched a full scale attack on the fire bases situated on the PDJ. At that time, the full extent of the attack and damage inflicted on the bases was not known. The aircraft were dispatched with emergency ammo and rations for the bases under attack. I was not flying that day, so do not have the complete details of what transpired through the course of the day. I do know that the Otters came under intense ground fire and XW-PHP with Dan Cloud took a hit through the forward fuel cell. To quote Cloud, ‘as I went into drop at Fox-Braavo, every tree and bush opened up on me.’ Cloud’s aircraft was the only one hit that day, but all aircraft were being fired on continuously.

A CASI Twin Otter and an Air America C-130E at Long Tieng (“Alternate”) in 1971/72, taken by Fred Walker

(UTD/Walker, photo no. 1FW-7-16-PC29, also on UTD/Treasures)

\textsuperscript{309} All details from the log book of Allen Rich, preserved at UTD/Rich/B1.

\textsuperscript{310} E-mail dated 2 February 2013 kindly sent to the author by Lee Gossett.

\textsuperscript{311} Thomas G. Fosmire, Interview, conducted by Prof. Bill Leary at Florence, SC, on 28 December 92, transcript, in: UTD/Leary/B82F21.
“On December 19th, Captains Douglas, Cloud and Dearborn flew the [CASI Twin] Otters to Alternate. Enroute, Cricket gave us a running account of the previous night’s activities. All very grim. Many of the smaller pads and satellite fire bases had been overrun and in some cases tanks were used. The main fire bases of King Kong, Rossini, Mustang, Tom Tom, Sting Ray and Cobra were still active, with Mustang and Tom Tom taking a severe pounding from the 130mm guns of the NVA. Four Otters worked the PDJ that day – three CAS and one AAM flown by Capt. Don Romes who did an outstanding job. The first mission of the day was to get 155mm ammo to King Kong and Rossini positions. All three CAS Otters were assigned this job. Impact chutes were used and the drop altitude was to be at least 7000’ or 10000’ AGL. Capt. Douglas went in for the first drop. I followed in this pattern, getting set up for the drop when King Kong advised we were taking heavy ground fire. I saw three gun positions (12.7mm) 400 yards west of King Kong. They were firing so rapidly that a dust cloud was raised out of the trees giving their position away. We discontinued the drop and moved off south of the fire base. I called for fire support to silence the 12.7mm guns, but neither counter battery or air cover was available. It was ultimately learned that four 12.7mm anti-aircraft [guns] were firing at us and they ringed the King Kong position. We were unable to complete any more drops at King Kong, and in fact, no further attempt was made to get supplies into these two fire bases. The NVA set up a complete anti-aircraft system around these two bases and even the T-28’s refused to go against them. The supplies for King Kong were dropped at alternate DZ’s.

“The next mission on this day was an attempt to drop to the Mustang fire base and DZ’s Fox-Bravo and Fox-Echo, both of which were about to be overrun. Again, the 3 CAS Otters were sent out. Capt. Cloud was the first aircraft and actually got to Fox-Echo when they opened up on him with 12.7mm, 37mm anti-aircraft. Capt. Cloud made one pass and dropped, when he took a hit in the left wing and a 37mm exploded inboard of the right wing putting a hole in the flap. Cloud discontinued the drop and made a hasty exit to safer territory with 37mm exploding all around the aircraft very accurately. The remaining two Otters did not get to the DZ before coming under intense ground fire.

“The third attempt of the day was to re-supply Hotel-Delta and Hotel-Yankee pads at the base of Tom Tom. This job was assigned to me and the AAM Otter. Tom Tom was being pounded quite hard by 130mm guns and actually had NVA soldiers on the hill, breaching the barbed wire to get to the guns. T-28’s were using CBU against our own positions after advising the Thai’s to get in their bunkers and stay down. I took the first drop into Hotel-Delta and dropped with impact chutes about 2000’ AGL. Only one out of seven opened. The ground controller at HD [i.e. Hotel-Delta] said they were under attack constantly and they needed help. Small arms and 37mm fire against the Otter was at a minimum for some reason and after completing my drop the AAM Otter came in and dropped at Hotel-Yankee. He took two 37mm burst, but were some distance from the aircraft. Through the whole drop, Tom Tom was taking heavy incoming and the Thai controller’s voice was strained and quivering as he asked for help and re-supply. He said over half his battery was dead and wounded and the NVA were breaching the perimeter defenses. They could not hold up much longer. One more attempt was made to re-supply Fox-Bravo and Fox-Echo. This time, T-28’s were to go in with us and suppress the ground fire. Six T-28’s and two CAS Otters were picked for the job. Half way into the drop zone all aircraft came under heavy fire and Capt. Cloud was hit for a second time. They blew the right main tire with small arms fire. The drop was discontinued. We made several more drops that day, but nothing of consequence and only

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small arms fire was encountered. The day ended with the NVA shooting down an F-4, two T-28s’ shot down, and one chopper crashing.

“The following day the action picked up. During the night, Tom Tom and Mustang were overrun. Lion was lost and the survivors were heading south with the NVA and Russian PT-76 tanks in hot pursuit. The weather was bad and it was going to be another day without fighter support. Most of the positions were under heavy attack and an attempt was being made to re-supply the survivors and stragglers from Tom Tom, Mustang and Lion. The only aircraft out on the PDJ the 20th were 3 CAS Otters. These were flown by Douglas, Dearborn and Adolph. My first drop was to Cobra battery. They had not been hit as hard as the others. I made my pass and drops in a continuous blaze of small arms fire that could not reach my altitude or was very inaccurate. The next drops were Douglas and myself at fire base Panther. We made the drops through continuous artillery fire that was hitting the November-November and November-Alpha pads. The situation was getting rather tense and critical as Russian PT-76 tanks were moving west toward Panther at a rapid pace. The weather was bad and the ceiling was low precluding any air strikes of any significance. At one point while dropping to November-Alpha, a Russian tank, a few hundred yards away was blasting the DZ after each pass I made. I finally discontinued dropping when I saw the Thai’s start to abandon the position under heavy tank fire. We only worked till noon on the PDJ December 20th, because by noon everything was lost except King Kong and Rossini. They were both completely surrounded with no chance of escape and I assume they surrendered. We had contact with the survivors right up to the last and they advised the enemy were pursuing them with determined resolution. By 1300 Local, our efforts were confined to picking up the wounded and survivors of the fire bases. Most of them were working their way back to LS-15, Ban Na. A pitiful sight from two weeks before. The majority were shell-shocked and most were suffering from wounds, exposure, or shock in one form or another. I set these facts down to keep you appraised of what our aircraft and pilots did. On the last day, there was no one out on the Plain of Jars except Continental.”\(^{312}\)

Les Strouse flew with Continental Air Services between 1971 and 1975. He started as a C-46 pilot: “I went to work for CASI in May 1971. I was initially hired to be a Porter pilot but due to the imminent arrival of three additional C-46s and my heavy airplane background it was decided that I would be checked out in the C-46. My C-46 training started on 28 May flying copilot on a rice drop. I started my Captain training on 13 June, again on a rice drop. On 6 July I took my FAA type rating check and became a C-46 Captain. CASI C-46s were C-46F models. N67961, N1447, N9760Z with XW-TDG added to the fleet on 14 Aug 72. The additional C-46s must have arrived in late July or very early August as I first flew XW-PHL on 3 August. Three C-46R models, XW-PHL, XW-PHM and XW-PHN, later to become N335CA, N336CA, and N337CA. These airplanes were Transport Category. They had 60 ‘Payloader’ seats that folded up against the side walls when carrying cargo. The primary mission of CASI C-46s was rice dropping. We would make three or four trips out of Vientiane to various drop zones on any given day... weather permitting.”\(^{313}\) This is confirmed

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\(^{313}\) E-mail dated 10 February 2014 kindly sent to the author by Les Strouse.
by Allen Rich’s log book, who flew drop missions out of Vientiane since 10 August 71. Between 24 August and 15 September 71, the entire operation moved to Udorn due to the Mekong flood, and so, during that period of time, he flew drop missions into Laos out of Udorn, using CASI C-46s N9760Z, N67961, XW-PHL, XW-PHM, and N1447. After a commissary flight to Bangkok in XW-PHN on 16 and 17 September, he flew drop missions out of Vientiane again, and that most of the time until December 73, using the same CASI C-46s, and since October 72 also C-46 XW-TDG. C-46 N67961 crashed on 9 February 72. From rescue reports from the 3rd AFR Group Sid Nanson adds the following details: “Last known position 17 59 N 102 34E. Last heard from at 0207Z hours over L-08. Found on the 12/2/72 by ‘non USAF helicopter’ at 19 04 N 102 46 E. 5 on board. All on board deceased.”

Like Air America, CASI also flew some scheduled services or milk-runs: “One of its most famous was the ‘50-Kip’ flight or ‘CASI milk-run’, a regular CASI DC-3 flight from Udorn to Bangkok in Thailand then to Vientiane, Savannakhet and Pakse in Laos returning to Udorn. […] CASI also developed contracts to provide both aircraft and pilots to fly Air Commando forward air controllers (FACs) in Laos.” As has been shown in the files Air America in Laos I – humanitarian work, part II, CASI took over Air America’s Laos milk runs in 1972. Les Strouse recalls that there were more milk-runs and also some ‘commissary’ flights: “As Air America phased down, CASI picked up the weekly ‘milk run’ flights. To the best of my memory, the Northern milk run was from Vientiane to Vang Vieng, Luang Prabang, Sayaboury, Ban Houie Sai and return. The Southern milk run was Vientiane to Takhet, Savannakhet, Pakse and return. There was also a weekly ‘commissary flight’

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315 E-mail dated 30 October 2014, kindly sent to the author by Sid Nanson.
Vientiane to Bangkok and return. This flight departed on Tuesdays and returned on Thursdays. At least once a month there was also an Embassy Commissary flight from Bangkok to Rangoon and return, on Wednesday. Messed up our partying in Bangkok! I flew the C-46s exclusively until 31 Dec 73 when I was furloughed. I had survived the first CASI cutback, but was reduced to First Officer with left seat privileges. Most Captains did let me fly half the flights from the left seat. Better than being unemployed!"\(^{318}\)

This is again confirmed by the log book of Allen Rich, who notes in his log book: 30 September 71, “Milk Run South L-08 [i.e. Vientiane]-L-39 [i.e. Savannakhet]-L-11 [i.e. Pakse] + ret[urn]” in C-46 XW-PHM and 1 October 71, “Milk Run North L-08 [i.e. Vientiane]-L-54 [i.e. Luang Prabang]-L-25 [i.e. Ban Houei Sai] WX [i.e. due to weather] + ret[urn]” in C-46 XW-PHN.\(^{319}\) More Milk Run South and Milk Run North flights are noted in Allen Rich’s log book: And while the route pattern of the Southern milk run was always Vientiane-Savannakhet-Pakse and back, the Northern milk run sometimes varied a little bit, being Vientiane-Ban Houei Sai-Luang Prabang-Ban Houei Sai-Vientiane on 30 November 71 or Vientiane (L-08)-Vang Vieng (L-16)-Sayaboury (L-23)-Luang Prabang (L-54)-Ban Houei Sai (L-25)-Luang Prabang (L-54)-Sayaboury (L-23)-Vang Vieng (L-16)-Vientiane (L-08) on 10 December 71, both trips flown in CASI C-46 XW-PHM. In late 1971 and early 1972, Allen Rich also flew some comissary C-46 flights to Bangkok, sometimes adding the Embassy flight to Phnom Penh, and sometimes he shuttled between Vientiane and Luang Prabang, when the road was closed. Between 25 and 27 June and then between 11 and 13 July 72, he flew CASI's radio intelligence C-47s XW-PDE and XW-PFT out of Udorn; these were 10+ hour flights mostly to the north.\(^{320}\)

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318 E-mail dated 10 February 2014 kindly sent to the author by Les Strouse.
Later, Les Strouse joined CASI again: “I was recalled as a Captain in July 74. I do not know the actual date. I started my Porter check out on 22 July. The Porters were used for cargo and passenger delivery to STOL strips, primarily. They also did air drops of food and other supplies to small villages that did not have airstrips. […] I am sure that the Porters and Twin Otters did [also] fly paramilitary cargo. They pretty much worked for the same customers as AAM. […] Porters originally had dull grey paint scheme then went to the Continental white with black and gold stripes and lastly to white with red trim and gold tail. ‘Proud bird with gold tail’ from Continental Air Lines. […] Porters that I flew […] were XW-PCI, XW-PEO, XW-PFW, XW-PGN, and XW-PKI. Later, the Porters were FAA registered, N62148, N62149, N62153, N62154 and N62156.”

Allen Rich also returned to CASI in August 74 and flew missions in their Porters, mostly out of Ban Xon (LS-272), Luang Prabang (L-54) or Ban Houei Sai (L-25); from 13 December 74 onwards until 7 April 75, his log book only lists US-registered CASI Porters.

Left: CASI PC-6 XW-PCR in the original gray colors (photo kindly submitted by Les Strouse)
Right: CASI Porter XW-PDC, painted in their second colors, offloading troops (UTD photo at http://libtreasures.utdallas.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10735.1/687/1-LL11-3-PC64.jpg?sequence=1)

Continental Air Services PC-6B Turbo Porters XW-PDC and XW-PDI painted in the colors of the 1960ies and early 1970ies (photos kindly submitted by Les Strouse)

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321 E-mail dated 10 February 2014 kindly sent to the author by Les Strouse.
CASI PC-6Bs XW-PEO at LS-40A and XW-PKI at LS-274 in the red and golden colors, both probably taken in December 1974 (with kind permission from Les Strouse)

US-regd. CASI PC-6Bs at Vientiane in June 75, readied for ferry to Bangkok to go on sale (with kind permission from Les Strouse)

Les Strouse also recalls another type of missions he flew: “I did a self-checkout in the Twin Beech H-18 on 25 July 74. The H-18 was a recip with tricycle gear. CASI had two, N18843 and N906T. Interesting thing here was that one of the airplanes had carburetors the other was fuel injected. Different starting procedure for each. Made for many backfiring starts if you used the wrong procedure. The Twin Beechs were primarily for VIP transport. Single crew except when carrying the U.S. Ambassador when two Captains were required. I alternated between the Porter and Twin Beech until 20 January 1975.”

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323 E-mail dated 10 February 2014 kindly sent to the author by Les Strouse.
Like Air America crews, CASI crews were taken prisoner or killed while flying in Southeast Asia: “At least one CASI pilot, Emmett Kay was captured by Pathet Lao troops at a Lima Site near LS32 in North-Central Laos.\(^{324}\) He ran out of fuel and force-landed his Porter on a plateau to the east of LS32. His passengers were a Hmong guerrilla team, some of whom escaped capture. Kay was kept prisoner in various caves in Laos. After being held in captivity for sixteen and one-half months he was released as part of a prisoner exchange on September 18, 1974. Several CASI personnel are listed as MIA and as many as fourteen CASI pilots and crew were killed during the war.”\(^{325}\) And like Air America, CASI had most of its Laos fleet sitting idle in 1974. As CASI’s Vientiane Daily Flight Schedule of 16 June 74 shows, CASI C-46 XW-PHN was not scheduled to fly out of Bangkok, and Twin Otter XW-PGV as well as Baron N7303 did not fly out of Vientiane that day, while CASI Porters XW-PCI, XW-PFC, XW-PFW, XW-PEO, XW-PGN, and XW-PKI were on standby that day.\(^{326}\)

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\(^{324}\) Capt. Kay had been en route to Phu Cum, when he was shot down or landed in Ban Ban valley on 7 May 73 (Conboy / Morrison, Shadow war, p.407, note 9).

\(^{325}\) Tom Ziemba, Continental Air Services, Inc. - History, in: http://www.air-america.net/casi-hist.htm. According to Conboy / Morrison, Shadow war, p.407 note 9, Kay was captured on 7 May 73, when he was en route to Phu Cum.

Like Air America, CASI had operational bases at Vientiane, Udorn and Saigon. Like Air America, but to a greater extent, CASI also flew out of Phnom Penh after 1970/1 – mainly commercial freight and passengers throughout Southeast Asia\(^{327}\) using at least C-47s N55L (until it crashed at Phnom Penh on 14 February 71)\(^{328}\) and N4995E (which became XU-AAD in 1970/1 and was operated by CASI for Khmer Akas Airlines)\(^ {329}\), but unlike Air America, CASI also had operations out of Singapore for some time – mainly in support of major oil companies.\(^ {330}\) At the end, in early 1975, CASI flew some hair raising support missions to Phnom Penh. Les Strouse recalls: “I alternated between the Porter and Twin Beech until 20 January 1975 when I got recurrent in the C-46. Then on 22 January, it was off to Bangkok to take over N337CA that was on a U.S. Embassy contract for flights between Bangkok and Phnom Penh and some local flights within Cambodia. The only time, with Air America and CASI, that I had a fixed crew. The same copilot and loadmaster (kicker) for the rest of my time with CASI. This had to have been the riskiest operation that I encountered in SEA. Phnom Penh had incoming rockets or artillery most every day. I even had my picture in Newsweek Magazine. Laying under my airplane during an attack. Shortly after we landed, a siren went off. That indicated approximately 10 seconds warning of incoming. No sense in running toward the bunker. No one knew where the round(s) might land. One day, we were delayed, due to VIP late arrival at Bangkok. We departed 30 minutes late for Phnom Penh. Five minutes after our scheduled arrival time, two 122 rockets landed in our regular parking spot. Lucky for us that we were delayed! FWIW 122 rockets could not be aimed at specific targets, so they just happened to land in our parking spot. Not that they were aimed there. Just aimed at the airport in general. We flew almost every day until 10 April when it was over.”\(^ {331}\) During the same period of time, Les Strouse also flew for Khmer Akas: “Khmer Akas was a CASI subsidiary. It was strictly a commercial operation. No U.S. Government contracts.


\(^{329}\) CASI, planes owned and operated in Laos, Thailand and Cambodia area as of 3 May 71, in: UTD/Bison/B5, microfilm reel no. 29.


\(^{331}\) E-mail dated 10 February 2014 kindly sent to the author by Les Strouse.
Pilots were TDY from CASI. The CASI operation from Bangkok to Phnom Penh in 1975 was strictly a support operation. I flew that C-47 from Jan 75 until the end 10 Apr 75.”

![CASI C-46 N337CA and Khmer Akas C-47 XU-LAN, both at Phnom Penh in 1975](with kind permission from Les Strouse)

Apart from its private ownership, the main difference between CASI and Air America was that CASI did not operate any helicopters, and so their support to Vang Pao’s army was limited to supply drops, but they could not carry soldiers from one small battle field to another. Out of Udorn, their C-47s flew to Vientiane (L-08), Sam Thong (LS-20), Long Tieng (LS-20A), Moung Soui (L-108), Luang Prabang (L-54), Savannakhet (L-39), Pakse (L-11) or Takhli (T-05), while their Pilatus Porters and Beech Barons operated to the same destinations, plus to some others like Ken Thao (L-06), Na Khang (LS-36), Houei Hinsa (LS-215), Moung Phalane (L-61) or Nam Lieu (LS-118A). Out of Vientiane, CASI aircraft operated to destinations like Long Tieng (LS-20A), Vang Vieng (L-16), Ban Houei Sai (L-25), Hin Heup (LS-365), Phong Hong (LS-133), Ban Xon (LS-272), Ban Xieng Lom (LS-69), Savannakhet (L-39), Paksane (L-35), and, of course, to various drop zones in Laos designated by USAID.

As has been seen, the CASI aircraft based at Saigon were all leased to Air Vietnam. Tom Ziemba of Air America Collectors’ Network notes about CASI’s operations in South Vietnam: “CASI’s original purpose was to operate aircraft and ground facilities to support projects involving construction, oil exploration and engineering companies as well as contracts with USAID and other government agencies. […] CASI’s Vietnam-based operations directly supported a consortium of construction companies known as RMK-BRJ (Raymond International, Morrison-Knudsen, Brown and Root, and J.A. Jones) with some Customer operations. […] During the Tet Offensive of January 29th, 1968 one CASI pilot […] captured a Vietcong sapper on the flight line at Tan Son Nhut airport. In recognition of his bravery, the pilot was awarded a gold medal by Robert Six, then president of Continental. […] Air Vietnam and CASI engaged in a joint venture agreement under which CASI would

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332 E-mail dated 14 February 2014 kindly sent to the author by Les Strouse.
333 In 1968, Continental Air Services leased Fairchild-Hiller 1100 N526FH (msn 26) from the manufacturer for some time, but it crashed the same year (Memorandum “Competitive information” of 18 June 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2), and this was the end of their helicopter operations.
334 See the Vientiane daily flight schedules (in: UTD/Severson/B1F7), and the log books of Duane Keele (in: UTD/Keele/B1F6) and Donald Wharton (in: UTD/Wharton/B1F2) as well as the Flight crew member monthly reports of H. F. Miller, in: UTD/Miller/B4F6.
share Air Vietnam’s certificate in order to fly passenger and air cargo routes with Air Vietnam. This was primarily to enable CASI to operate in Vietnam. At Tan Son Nhat near Saigon and at other locations CASI shared flight line, maintenance and hanger space with Air Vietnam. The dragon roundel insignia from Air Vietnam appears on many CASI aircraft operating from Saigon as well as on the gold medal for meritorious service.”

By the end of 1965, CASI had 4 aircraft in Saigon under contract to RMK, in February 66, there were 8 aircraft, and in April 66, no less than 16 CASI aircraft were contracted to RMK at Saigon.

In June 1968, CASI operated a total of 18 aircraft in South Vietnam: 2 Do-28s (N9181X and XW-PCT), 8 Barons (N522C, N1313Z, N1335Z, N1349Z, N1462G, N1563Z, N1778G, and N9361Y), 1 Beech H18 (N906T), and 7 C-47s (N55L, N620Z, N4995E, N64422, N64910, N65385, and N67674). As no details about CASI’s Saigon-based fleet are available for later years, details must be taken from other documents. On 3 January 70, CASI C-47 N64422 had a near miss with a USAF C-130 some 15 miles east of Cam Ranh.

CASI’s Saigon Flight Schedule for 15 October 1970 lists 12 aircraft: C-47 N13622 (msn 13622, ex XW-PEE) flew Saigon-Cam Ranh Bay-Tuy Hoa-Nha Trang-Cam Ranh Bay-Saigon, transporting passengers and cargo for RMK, and C-47 N7302 (msn 11971, ex XW-PFV) flew Saigon-Nhon Co-Saigon 3 times a day. CASI’s Short Skyvan XW-PGL (msn SH.1848, ex N3201) flew Saigon-Doc Tam-Vinh Long-NSA-Rachgia-Long Xuyen-Saigon that day. Do-28 N9184X (msn 3058) flew Saigon-An Tho-Duong Dong-Saigon; Do-28 N9182X (msn 3087) flew Saigon-NSA-Vi Thanh-Soc Trang-Vi Thanh-NSA-Saigon; and Do-28 N9185X (msn 3059) flew first Saigon-Baria-Saigon and then Saigon-Can Tho-Soc Trang-Bac Lieu-Soc Trang-Can Tho-Saigon. The 4th Do-28, N9181X (msn 3084), was based at Danang at that time. Two of CASI’s 4 Barons flew out of Saigon that day: N5702K (msn TC-711) flew a VIP mission to Long Xuyen and back to Saigon, while N9361Y (msn TC-19) flew Saigon-Long Xuyen-Vinh Long-Saigon. The other 2 Barons remained overnight outside Saigon: N1563Z (msn TC-223) at Danang and N1335Z (msn TC-135) at Cam Ranh Bay. Beech H18 N906T (msn BA-667) had a long trip up to the north that day, flying Saigon-Dalat-Cam Ranh Bay-Nha Trang-Tuy Hoa-Anh Danang-Qui Nhong-Saigon. All of these flights were operated for RMK, that is the consortium of construction companies known as RMK-BRJ (Raymond International, Morrison-Knudsen, Brown and Root, and J.A. Jones).

To sum up the situation, as has been seen by looking at CASI’s operations in Laos and in South Vietnam, competition between Continental Air Services and Air America was very strong, especially after 1968. “Immediately after purchase of Bird & Sons in September 1965, CASI moved to expand its operations from Laos into Vietnam and Thailand. To protect Air America and in return for arranging local introductions, Saigon Station exacted an understanding that CASI would confine its attention to contractors of the U.S. Government and would not challenge Air America’s monopoly of direct U.S. Government flying contracts. By 19 November 65 CASI and AVN had made an agreement, under which CASI began to provide services to contractors to the U.S. Government. In June 1967 the Vietnamese government made it clear that it regarded CASI’s operations to be based solely

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on the rights to fly bestowed upon AVN and that only through AVN could CASI operate."³⁴⁰

A CIA memo of 8 July 68 gives the following picture: “Approximately 1½ to 2 years ago there was a ‘GENTLEMAN’S AGREEMENT’ between CASI and Air America concerning support in Vietnam. This agreement was that CASI would not pursue any U.S. Government contracts for the rights to support commercial contractors in country. In return Air America would support the U.S. Government and would not pursue any commercial business in country.”³⁴¹ But as CASI’s business in South Vietnam did not develop as well as had been hoped, a new agreement was signed by CASI and Air Vietnam in August 68, speculating on a growth of business. This time, CASI’s calculations “included as part of this growth a movement into direct contract with the U.S. Government, an area of services which had been supplied exclusively by Air America. In fact, CASI stepped into this area recently by negotiation of a contract with AID/V for a C-47 for the last quarter of FY69 (mid-March through 30 June), which indicates CASI no longer feels it is precluded from this business by any previous understanding.”³⁴²

On 24 March 69, Ed Cotter, Senior Vice-President of Continental Air Lines, and Bill Hahn, Vice-President and CEO of CASI, visited the CIA at Washington to complain about competition from Air America in South Vietnam, charging that the CASI-Air Vietnam pursuit of a joint venture had “been sidetracked by Air America’s offer of a better deal than CASI can afford to make”³⁴³ The CIA confirmed that they didn’t change their attitude and that such an offer had perhaps been invented by Air Vietnam to get a better deal from CASI. For the visit of Robert Six to Washington, the CIA memo of 18 April 69 first speculated about what might happen after the end of hostilities in Vietnam and then concluded: “It is recommended that discussions with Mr. Six be on the basis that Air America arrangements, if pursued in Vietnam, would be on an interim, non-competitive basis, and that under no circumstances do we want to violate CASI’s long-term stayability.”³⁴⁴ On 9 January 70, CASI’s Bill Hahn was again at CIA, and this time, “Mr. Hahn said that CASI was reevaluating its position in Vietnam. CASI does not like the new Vietnamese officials with whom they must deal and is unsure what equities lie in continuing on in Vietnam.”³⁴⁵ Interestingly, as late as 1 April 1975, US Ambassador Graham Martin of Saigon sent a telex to the Secretary of State confirming his view “on the urgency of contracting with CASI on sole source basis to provide continuity and intensified air services which US Mission anticipates it will need as soon as practicable on highest priority basis. […] Events of last weeks have completely altered the circumstances affecting procurement of air services and U.S. Mission now requires an Air America successor capable and on all considerations able

³⁴⁰ See http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1818029/196903.pdf (CIA memo of 18 April 69, briefing CIA Headquarters on Air America and CASI developing local status in Vietnam, to prepare a visit of CAL’s President Robert Six at CIA during the week of 21 April 69).
³⁴² See http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1818029/196903.pdf (CIA memo of 18 April 69, briefing CIA Headquarters on Air America and CASI developing local status in Vietnam, to prepare a visit of CAL’s President Robert Six at CIA during the week of 21 April 69).
³⁴⁴ See http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1818029/196903.pdf (CIA memo of 18 April 69, briefing CIA Headquarters on Air America and CASI developing local status in Vietnam, to prepare a visit of CAL’s President Robert Six at CIA during the week of 21 April 69).

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to phase in to provide on-going services while Air America phases out.”

Of course, the conquest of South Vietnam by North Vietnamese troops on 30 April 75 put an end to all this.

In Thailand, CASI operated both under local air carrier (Bira Air Transport) rights by virtue of a joint venture agreement and under the authority of a U.S. Government agreement with the Thai government. So CASI engaged in contract and charter work both for U.S. Government entities and for non-U.S. Government customers. After CASI had to leave Laos, “we stayed in Bangkok and flew odd flights”, as Les Strouse recalls: “Some to Singapore, Rangoon, Udorn and Vientiane. [...] My last CASI flight was on 20 June 75. A Rangoon Commissary flight. My employment was terminated on 30 June 1975.”

As to the situation in Laos, as early as 10 October 1970, James A. Cunningham Jr., Air America’s Base Manager of Vientiane, complained about the disadvantageous share of the flying business Air America had in Vientiane. This was not so much the fact that, in September 70, CASI’s 31 aircraft flew 5,430 revenue block hours against the 6,605 revenue block hours flown by Air America’s 42 aircraft, which means that CASI evidently had a better utilization per aircraft than Air America. “The real difference between us doesn’t show”, he continues, “and that is that all of CASI’s airplanes are owned by CASI, with the attendant major difference in the revenue CASI gets from flying them. We operate, out of our fleet of 42 aircraft here, the following numbers and types, bailed to us by the US Government, and on which the only revenue comes in form of crew salaries and repairs performed by AAM on them: 12 C-123Ks [plus] 5 C-7As (soon to be increased to 6). In addition, we operate 2 C-46 so-called “Grant aircraft” given by USAID to the RLG [Royal Laotian Government], and on which we also obtain revenue only through pilot services and repairs. [...] The disturbing feature of this from our standpoint, is that the trend toward favoring bailed aircraft over those owned by AAM is well entrenched and actually expending both in fixed and rotary wing machines. [...] In the helicopter business, the small numbers of AAM-owned Bell choppers are dwarfed by the numbers of bailed UH-34D machines, which are growing rapidly to meet local needs. [...] As a final note, we also operate, on a bailed basis, C-130 project aircraft – up to two at a time – but whose flight time figures are not reported in our monthly totals cited on page one. These aircraft can each do the work of two C-123Ks, so, if they are working we are twice blessed – we make even less money because they take fewer people to operate! In summary, [...] I am afraid that we are not on a parity with CASI, nor does it look as though we can get to there from here under current policies.” This attitude explains why CASI’s fleet appeared at the first place on the memorandums Air America’s Far East offices sent to the Managing Director in Washington. Indeed, at another occasion, Robert F. Six, the president of Continental Airlines, said about their off-spring CASI that “the airline made a hell of a lot of money.”

After the cease-fire agreement of February 1973, the situation changed even dramatically in favor of CASI. The name Air America became like a program of US influence, and since

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347 See http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1818029/196903.pdf (CIA memo of 18 April 69, briefing CIA Headquarters on Air America and CASI developing local status in Vietnam, to prepare a visit of CAL’s President Robert Six at CIA during the week of 21 April 69).
348 E-mails dated 10 and 14 February 2014 kindly sent to the author by Les Strouse.
350 For example in the Memorandum “Competitive information” of 18 June 68 in: UTD/Herd/B2.
351 Quoted by Robbins, Air America, p.320.
many years, Air America had been related to the CIA in the world press. Already in March 1966, an article by Ed Hyde entitled “Air America – the CIA’s secret air force” appeared in Bluebook. In the September 1969, Aviation Week & Space Technology noted that Air America Porters were used in paramilitary operations for the CIA. In April 1970, Newsweek called Air America “an operating arm of the CIA”, and since that time, many newspapers linked Air America to the CIA. This explains why, after the cease-fire agreement of February 73, the US Embassy to Vientiane decided to “reduce Air America’s profile in Laos through the machinery of rather rapidly turning over to CASI almost all that remains of our flying requirements for FY [Fiscal Year] 73. [...] Apparently the political sphere locally decided that of the two alternatives offered by Air America and CASI, the latter was the least potentially offensive to the Prime Minister and the Pathet Lao,” James A. Cunningham, Air America’s Vice-President for Laos, wrote to Air America’s Managing Director Paul C. Velte on 23 March 73. One day later, Cunningham sent another letter to Velte which sounds a little bit more optimistic, stating that “although the Ambassador has personally made the decision to play down Air America’s role in Laos with CASI being pushed to the front as the chosen instrument for much of the US Mission air support requirement, this decision has not yet been concurred in by the Prime Minister.” But this optimism was unfounded, as Air America had to close down its base at Vientiane on 20 May 74, while CASI could remain until the spring of 1975.

But this state of competition did not exclude a cooperation between the two companies that exceeded the one between Air America and CASI’s predecessor Bird & Sons. Several times a year, Air America pilots or kickers used CASI’s aircraft to be flown as “deadheads” from their homes in Udorn, Thailand, to the aircraft they had to fly themselves and which were waiting for them somewhere in upcountry Laos, or to return home to their families after a week or so of flying in the Laotian mountains. Sometimes, CASI aircraft also transported them as “deadheads” from one base of operation to another. Over the years, the number of flights, on which Air America employees used CASI aircraft slightly increased. Destinations of such flights could be as far in the north as Houei Hinsa (LS-215) or as far in the south as Pakse (L-11), but quite often, they were Long Tieng (LS-20A), Sam Thong (LS-20) or even Vientiane (L-08).

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352 “Swiss government last week embargoed delivery of three Pilatus Turbo-Porter aircraft believed to have been purchased by Washington-based Air America on the grounds they were to be used in support of the war in Southeast Asia. [...] Swiss government officials said they did not know the aircraft were being used in paramilitary operations on Southeast Asia until Aug.26. Pilatus already has delivered 24 aircraft to Air America, and the latter firm has been using the aircraft openly in Southeast Asia for at least four years on missions in support of the Central Intelligence Agency” (Aviation Week & Space Technology, 1 September 1969, p.15, in: UTD/Hickler/B3F14).


354 In 1974, Victor Marchetti and John D. Marks (The CIA and the cult of intelligence, New York, p.137) even quote an official Pentagon paper by Brigadier General Edward Lansdale that states that already CAT had been “a CIA proprietary”, as was its successor Air America (p.139); extracts in: UTD/Hickler/B1F7.


356 Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committees of Air Asia Co Ltd and Air America Inc of 11 April 74, in: UTD/CIA/B10F1.

357 Bowers, The USAF in South-East Asia, p.463.

358 On 2 November 68, Air America helicopter pilot Duane Keele flew as “deadhead” in CASI PC-6A XW-PCE from Udorn (T-08) via Long Tieng (LS-20A) and Na Klang (LS-36) to Houei Hinsa (LS-215). But the destination Air America pilots were most often headed for when using CASI aircraft as deadheads seems to
aircraft wrecks from CASI – the four Porters and the three Helio Couriers have already been mentioned –, the cooperation between the two companies also manifested itself in the daily flight schedules of Vientiane, which first listed the departures of Vientiane-based Air America crews, then those of Air America crews from Udorn stopping over at Vientiane, and finally those of the CASI crews. Finally, both companies worked together in the field of reconnaissance or observation. CASI’s Barons and Porters were often used on reconnaissance flights, and sometimes, Air America employees – even pilots – rode in these aircraft as observers. It was during such a ride as an observer that Air America employee Robert N. Crone, Operations Manager of Vientiane, was killed on 12 February 69, when CASI PC-6B XW-PCE exploded in mid-air and crashed about 5 miles west of Ban Y (LS-187) in Laos.

For the employees themselves, the atmosphere reigning between Air America and Continental Air Services seems to have been rather that of cooperation than that of competition. In part, they knew them from former times: Robert L. (“Dutch”) Brongersma, a former CAT pilot who had been manager of Bird & Sons, became the general manager of CASI. Robert E. Rousselot had been CAT’s chief pilot since 1948 and the link between CAT and the CIA, before becoming president of Continental Air Services. Ed Dearborn, who had been a pilot with Air America, became chief pilot of Continental Air Services in 1965. Edwin (“Squire”) Eckholdt, who had flown C-46s, B-26Bs, C-123s, Caribous and T-28s for Air America, later flew the L-382s Hercules of CASI. Lee Gossett joined Air America in early 1966, went to CASI in mid-1968 and left Laos in June 1972. He characterizes the relation between Air America and CASI as follows: “From my prospective, CASI was a much better outfit to fly for than Air America and was a lean STOL operation. CASI would hire from the ranks of Alaskan bush pilots, crop dusters and air tanker fire fighting pilots, with the occasional ex-military pilot. Air America on the other hand, would hire mostly ex-military pilots. To the best of my recollection, there were about 17 pilots that came across from Air America to fly for CASI but to my knowledge, only one pilot ever went from CASI to Air America and he remained a co-pilot at both companies. CASI and Air have been Savannakhet and Pakse in the south – see the log books of Duane Keele (in: UTD/Keele/B1F6), and Donald Wharton (in: UTD/Wharton/B1F2) as well as the Flight crew member monthly reports of H. F. Miller, in: UTD/Miller/B4F6 for details of these deadhead flights.

539 The best collection of Vientiane daily flight schedules is contained in: UTD/Severson/B1F7.
540 The log book of Udorn based helicopter pilot Duane Keele (in: UTD/Keele/B1F6) reveals the following occasions on which he served as an observer in CASI aircraft flying reconnaissance missions: on 16 and 17 April 70 in Baron N4681 from and to Luang Prabang (L-54); on 18 and 24 April 70 in Baron N1778G from and to Luang Prabang (L-54); on 6 May 70 in PC-6B XW-PDG from and to Ba Khok Mai (LS-171); on 8 and 10 March 71 in Baron N1313Z from and to Savannakhet (L-39); on 30 March 71 in Baron N1778G from and to Luang Prabang (L-54); and on 7 May 71 in PC-6B XW-PEO from and to Houei Kong (L-56).
541 See Memorial file, in: UTD/LaShomb/B16F3. In his report of 28 April 69 about this accident (in: UTD/CIA/B34F3), the Air Asia Co Ltd Board of Review noted “that Mr. Crone was an observer aboard CASI Porter XW-PCE when during a rice drop the aircraft exploded in mid-air and crashed. Mr. Crone was aboard at the request of the USAID Air Support Branch and with the explicit concurrence of the Base Manager Vientiane.”
542 Robbins, Air America, p.68; as general manager, Brongersma was stationed at Vientiane (Leary, Manuscript, ch. V, p. 537, in: URD/Leary/B19F4.
543 Leary, Perilous missions, pp.133-35; Robbins, Air America, p.68. As Robert F. Six made him responsible for the acquisition of the 2 uneconomic L.382s, Rousselot was forced to resign in 1966, and Six personally took over as CEO of CASI (Leary, Manuscript, ch. V, p. 541, in: UTD/Leary/B19F4).
544 Hamilton-Merritt, Tragic mountains, pp.103, 114-6, and 138.
545 Video tape made by Ed Eckholdt, in the beginning.

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America pilots were like a brotherhood and would drop what we were doing at the drop of a hat and go to the aid of a fellow pilot. Most of the pilots that left Air America to fly for CASI were senior captains.”  

Allen W. Rich, who as a pilot for Air America, had already noted the accidents of Bird & Sons aircraft, continued to do so for the accidents of CASI aircraft, until he was hired by Continental Air Services on 13 March 69; and from then on, he also noted the accidents of Air America aircraft. On 21 January 74, Rich resigned from CASI effective 3 February 74, noting in his log book, that he was “very tired” – not too tired, however, as on 7 August 74, he was hired again by CASI, this time flying with them until 27 June 75. In the meantime, Continental Air Services had closed their Vientiane base in the spring of 1975, and the aircraft had been flown to Thailand.  

But the final note on Continental Air Services does not deal with the relation between them and Air America, but with the heroic deeds of some of their pilots who flew several evacuation missions. Les Strouse recalls: “I ended up in Vientiane for some reason not remembered. I did a test flight on a Twin Beech on 9 May. My last Twin Beech flight. On 10 May I was scheduled to ferry Porter N62154 to Bangkok. Pop Buell, Mr. Pop, was smuggled to the airport, and he flew out with me. The Pathet Lao were looking for him! My last Porter flight.”  

On the photo below, Pop Buell with Les Strouse’s CASI cap in his hand and Bird Air chopper pilot Jack Knotts, who had brought him to Vientiane, are facing the camera. Les Strouse, the pilot of CASI Porter N62154, is standing behind Mr. Pop, facing the aircraft.

Jack Knotts and Pop Buell at Vientiane airport on 10 May 1975  
(Les Strouse collection)

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366 E-mail dated 28 June 2006, kindly sent to the author by Lee Gossett.  
369 E-mail dated 10 February 2014 kindly sent to the author by Les Strouse.  
370 E-mail dated 14 February 2014 kindly sent to the author by Les Strouse.
The next evacuation was that of Long Tieng. Les Strouse recalls: “On 11 May, we were called to ferry N337CA from Bangkok to Udorn. Upon arrival, we were briefed about the evacuation of Long Tieng (LS-20A). Another CASI C-46, N336CA and a ‘borrowed’ USAF C-130 flown by a Bird Air crew were also part of the evacuation fleet. We flew evacuation flights on the 12th, 13th and 14th of May. The evacuation had been planned to last longer, but the crowd of refugees at Long Tieng became uncontrollable and we had to shut down the flights.”

On his last flight out of Long Tieng, his C-46 was mobbed and crowds attempted to throw the kicker (loadmaster) out of the plane when he attempted to stop the crowds. The flight was carrying over 60 passengers!”

Allen Rich was another one of the pilots who flew the CASI C-46s during the evacuation of Long Tieng. On 10 May 75, he ferried C-46 N337CA back from Singapore to Bangkok, noting in his log book that the aircraft was “enroute for Laos, [the] evacuation situation becoming critical.” On 11 May, he took C-46 N335CA from Bangkok to Vientiane which was to be used in the evacuation. On 12 May 75, he noted in his log book: “Gen[eral] Vang Pao’s Meo evacuation [out of] Long Chaing [sic]. 50+ pax crowd, very difficult to control. Approx[imately] 14000 in area, time very short.”

The evacuation of Long Tieng, 11 to 14 May 1975, as documented by the log book of Allen Rich

(in: UTD/Rich/B1)

13 May 75, he few C-46 N335CA into Long Tieng, noting: “150+ baggage per load.” And on 14 May 75, Allen Rich, still flying C-46 N335CA into Long Tieng for the evacuation, noted

371 E-mail dated 10 February 2014 kindly sent to the author by Les Strouse.
372 E-mail dated 14 February 2014 kindly sent to the author by Les Strouse.
373 A photo of this C-130 appeared in Hamilton-Merritt, Tragic mountains, p.171; for this C-130, organized by Brigadier General Aderholt and flown by former Bird Air pilot Matt Hoff, see also ib., pp.342-45, and Trest, Air Commando One, p.252.
374 Website of Leigh Coleman Hotujec at http://www.airambrat.com/evacuation.html. She continues (p.7): “When crowd control became a safety issue in Long Tieng, the planes were ordered to fly out of alternate sites in the refugee transports. They removed all of the seats and tied ropes across the planes at intervals to keep everyone from sliding into the tail. Two C-46s and a C-130 moved approximately 12,000 people. Three trips – refuel – wash out of the planes – then do it again – 14 hours a day.”
in his log book: “shooting + fighting on the ramp getting bad. Staging refugees 150+ per C-46 load.”\(^{375}\) On its last flight out of Long Tieng, the C-130 even carried 300 refugees.\(^{376}\) Although Long Tieng was certainly not comparable to Saigon, this evacuation of the Hmong people in overcrowded C-46s was certainly at least as heroic as the helicopter evacuation of Saigon. For the landing strip of Long Tieng “has been described by most who know as one of the most treacherous in Laos. Skyline ridge on one side, mountains on the other and a large karst at the end of the runway made the valley a difficult target to navigate on and out of even under the best conditions for anything larger than a Pilatus Porter or other STOL (short take off and landing) aircraft. [...] The C-46s into LS-20A were routine, but when they ran the numbers in the book during the evacuations, they came up with a


\(^{376}\) Trest, *Air Commando One*, p.252; according to Ahern, *Undercover armies*, pp.512/3, “two C-130 missions took out 425 people”.

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maximum passenger load of 35 refugees and their meager belongings.”377 Flying more than 150 passengers in an aircraft that should carry not more than 35 of them under normal circumstances and flying them out of such a difficult place like Long Tieng is an act of heroism that should never be forgotten.

There was one more heroic evacuation made out of Long Tieng by a CASI pilot (Dave Kouba) and a Bird Air helicopter pilot (Jack Knotts): “Dave will go down in the History books for the following: The date was 14 May 1975. The mission was to extract Gen. Vang Pao and [CIA operative] Jerry Daniels from Long Tieng, Laos. It had to be a ‘combined’ helicopter-fixed wing operation. Reason: The helicopter (Bird Air) was prohibited from overflying Thailand, so could not fly the passengers legally to Udorn. A transfer would be necessary at an abandoned strip (LS-113) so the CASI Porter could then complete the trip to Udorn. It was necessary to extract the two separately by helicopter in a secret manner. Helicopter boarding from a masked position so as not viewed by anyone on the field & ramp. Reason: They (VP & Jerry) couldn’t be seen by the thousands of Hmong refugees just climbing into an aircraft on the ramp and openly leaving. Tension was extremely high with thousands of weapons around. Bird Air (Jack Knotts) and CASI (Dave Kouba) were chosen at 02:30 am to prepare for a possible 06:30 pick-up. The two A/C arrived on time but the pick-up was delayed until about 10:00. Dave Kouba took off and orbited over check point Peter. The helicopter made a secret pick-up, married-up with the Porter, flew to LS-113 for transfer to Dave Kouba’s Porter and he flew Gen. Vang Pao, a body guard, and Jerry Daniels to T-08 Udorn, Thailand.”378

However, this was not the last evacuation that CASI was engaged in that year: “We continued moving refugees from Udorn to Nam Phong 15-20 May,” Les Strouse notes.379 At the end, there was even something that came close to being captured: “On the 24th of May I received a call to bring my C-46 to Vientiane for maintenance,” Les Strouse remembers. “To arrive just at dark. We did NOT need any maintenance! As soon as we parked the airplane cowling and hatches were all opened. People swarmed all over the airplane. One hour later, they were all closed and we were told to depart. By radio, we were told to open the hatch in the cockpit floor after we entered Thai airspace. SEVENTEEN people came out of that small space. They were some of the people who swarmed all over the airplane. Anyone watching did not miss them! They were Nationalist Chinese employees and their families. The Pathet Lao had refused to let them leave normally. The next evening the same thing. This time it was Filipinos. The next day we were called to come to Vientiane to pick up ‘company cargo’. By now, we were very leery of going back into Vientiane. We discussed it and decided that this would be our last such trip. The cargo was really company maintenance equipment. The copilot and I stayed in the cockpit. About half way through the loading the ‘Lao Students’ showed up. No self-respecting Lao Student would have had a military hair cut! LOL They claimed that the cargo...lathes, etc...were property of the Lao people and could not be taken out. The negotiations for our release lasted two hours. The cargo that had already been loaded was unceremoniously dumped onto the ramp and we cranked up and blasted out of the parking area. After departure, we were complimented by CASI management for the good job we had done. There was a group of the so-called students on a maintenance stand. We blew it

379 E-mail dated 10 February 2014 kindly sent to the author by Les Strouse.
over! And we were told to NEVER COME BACK TO LAOS.”

The end of Continental Air Services Inc came soon: “CASI was dissolved by Continental with the remainder of its aircraft being sold or having their registrations cancelled through June of 1977. Unlike Air America, CASI has not yet received official recognition from the U.S. Government for its service and sacrifice during the Vietnam War period.”

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380 E-mail dated 10 February 2014 kindly sent to the author by Les Strouse.
10) **The cooperation with China Airlines:**
This issue has been dealt with in the files *Air America in South Vietnam I, II, and III*. See

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